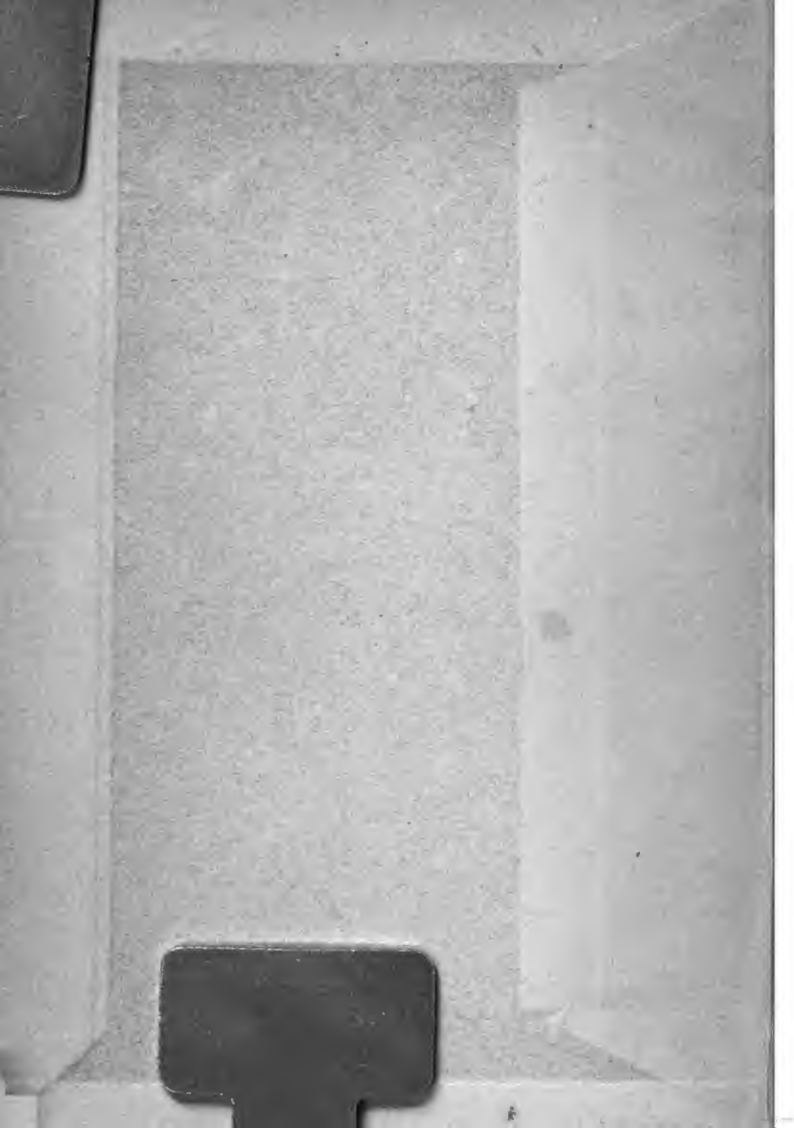






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**COLLECTION
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VOL. 1317.

PASCAREL BY OUIDA

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. 2.

LEIPZIG: BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

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PASCARÈL.

ONLY A STORY.

BY

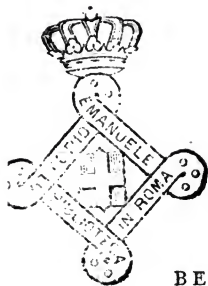
OUIDA,

AUTHOR OF "TRICOTRIN," "CHANDOS," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1873.

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PASCARÈL.

BOOK IV. (*Continued.*)

THE WANDERING ARTE.

CHAPTER VI.

Gwyn Araun.

"WHAT life then would you really like?" I asked him once, in bewilderment at his utter scorn for all manner and degree of aggrandisement, and the touch of impatience at his own mode of existence which now and then escaped him.

"Gwyn Araun's!" he responded, promptly; "I think that is the only perfect one that ever was known upon earth."

"Gwyn Araun?" I asked, in amaze. "He was not a Florentine."

"No; he was not a Florentine. He comes of a race called Fable. We have never been famous for harbouring his kind. They loved shade; and we are all light. Gwyn Araun and his race are ferns that grow where it is moist and dark. They belong to the primæval ages of the world. Gwyn Araun, to begin with, had a horse that could transport him anywhere in an instant—to the moon if he wished. He could converse with the stars and the flowers, the clouds and

the trees, the gods and the butterflies, turn by turn. He could wander invisible, and take any shape that he desired. He had absolute omniscience, and he used his power always to save and to soothe and to pleasure mankind. Finally he had an ivory horn, at whose note of enchantment all melancholy fled. That is the only perfect existence I ever heard of, and he lived in the golden age of Myth, in the depths of the Scandinavian woods or Teuton forests, I do not quite remember which."

"And what became of him?"

"He disappeared. That is another perfection of Gwyn Araun's species. They never die, they disappear. If we did the same it would be much more agreeable; it is difficult to retain much idealism, when one knows one must end in a wooden box, and have the flies buzzing about one as about a sheep's trotters on a butcher's stall. Gwyn Araun vanished because he fell in with a sage of prosaic mind, who, being bidden by him to a feast of spiced meats and ambrosial draughts in jewelled dishes and cups of gold, saw with the eyes of the flesh only, and stubbornly maintained that there was no food or drink at all in all the place, but only dead forest-leaves and brook-water. Which so disgusted Gwyn Araun that he fled from earth for evermore. But he comes back sometimes even still in the shape of a poet, invisible to men, and riding on his winged horse that can circle the sun in five seconds; and then he spreads the divine feast again; and again the prosaic sage which calls himself the World repeats the same scoff at it; and, again, Gwyn Araun flies away in sorrow and disdain. That is, as the World phrases it—the poet perishes broken-hearted."

This was the manner in which Pascarel would talk to me when the mood was on him, lying under the vines in the noon heats, lazily touching a chord of his mandoline, or wandering down some hill-side when the moon was high amongst the trembling stalks of maize.

And the charm of the quaint, fantastic, half-spiritual, sportive, pathetic, whimsical discourse of his so grew upon me, little by little, that it acted like a spell. All my rebellion against my fate, my desires for riches, my feverish dreams of strange fortunes and of high estate, sank away into an absolute contentment. Beside a dreamer who only thought a life like the Genius Gwyn Araun's worth the envying, all mere ambition looked meretricious and empty; and beside a philosopher who broke his dry bread contentedly under a peasant's house-vine, after a half day's march along the mountains, one becomes ashamed to yearn after such pitiful things as pearls and rubies and fine raiment.

CHAPTER VII.

Olivet.

PASCAREL believed in genius. It was his religion. For mediocrity his contempt was boundless.

Genius he had himself, and of the rarest sort. The countless trifles which he flung away with such lavishness amongst the populace were gems of the utmost perfection in their kind.

The brightest wit, the subtlest philosophy, the most gracious charms of poetry and symmetry characterised these ephemeral creations which he composed one after

another, without effort, almost, one could have said, without thought, and which, when they had served their turn for a few nights, he remembered no longer, and which would have been thrown away and lost for ever had not little Toccò, who worshipped him, been wont tenderly to collect the scattered scraps and ends of paper on which Pascarel wrote down these fancies in a careless stenography which served him and baffled all others.

My own dreams that I might have any touch of genius in me he dismissed with unutterable contempt, half gay, half tender.

"Genius!" he cried. "Cara mia, when you sang in the Market-place of Verona, you were a perfect picture, that I grant. But a dog leapt on you with muddy paws, and you paused in your singing to brush the snow off your yellow skirts. If you had had any genius, singing as you sang, what would you have known though fifty dogs should have soiled your gown? You have no genius. Be thankful. What do women want with it when they have as fair a face as you? At your best you will never be more than a mandoline, which will answer in true chords to the touch of a fine player. You will never originate a cadence one whit more than the mandoline ever does."

"And what shall I be at my worst?" I cried, not well pleased at his verdict.

"Oh, at your worst, of course, you will be the mandoline with every string broken, like everything else at its worst. But what is more probable is, that you will fall into the hands of some musician who will just get out of you all the vile flourishes and ornate floriture which go down as good music in this

world, you all the while believing the bungler who runs his roulades on you to be a great maestro.

"It is women's way. They always love colour better than form, rhetoric better than logic, priestcraft better than philosophy, and flourishes better than fugues. It has been said scores of times before I said it.

"Nay," he pursued, thinking he had pained me, "you have a bright wit enough, and a beautiful voice, though you sing without knowing very well what you do sing. But genius you have not, look you; say your thanksgiving to the Madonna at the next shrine we come to; genius you have not."

"What is it?"

"Well, it is hard to tell; but this is certain, that it puts peas unboiled into the shoes of every pilgrim who really gets up to its Olivet.

"Genius has all manner of dead dreams and sorrowful lost loves for its scallop-shells; and the palm that it carries is the bundle of rods wherewith fools have beaten it for calling them blind.

"Genius has eyes so clear that it sees straight down into the hearts of others through all their veils of sophistry and simulation; and its own heart is pierced often to the quick for shame of what it reads there.

"It has such long and faithful remembrance of other worlds and other lives which most mortals have forgotten, that beside the beauty of those memories all things of earth seem poor and valueless.

"Men call this imagination or idealism; the name does not matter much; whether it be desire or remembrance it comes to the same issue; so that genius, going ever beyond the thing it sees in infinite longing

for some higher greatness which it has either lost or otherwise cannot reach, finds the art, and the humanity, and the creations, and the affections which seem to others so exquisite most imperfect and scarcely to be endured.

“The heaven of Phædrus is the world which haunts Genius—where there shall not be women but Woman, not friends but Friendship, not poems but Poetry; everything in its uttermost wholeness and perfection; so that there shall be no possibility of regret nor any place for desire.

“For in this present world there is only one thing which can content it, and that thing is music; because music has nothing to do with earth, but sighs always for the lands beyond the sun.

“And yet all this while genius, though sick at heart, and alone, and finding little in man or in woman, in human art or in human nature, that can equal what it remembers—or, as men choose to say, it imagines—is half a child too, always: for something of the eternal light which streams from the throne of God is always shed about it, though sadly dimmed and broken by the clouds and vapours that men call their atmosphere.

“Half a child always, taking a delight in the frolic of the kids, the dancing of the daffodils, the playtime of the children, the romp of the winds with the waters, the loves of the birds in the blossoms. Half a child always, but always with tears lying close to its laughter, and always with desires that are death in its dreams.

“No; you have not genius, *cara mia*. Say your grazie at the next shrine we pass.”

I heard him with humiliation and a sense of my own littleness.

Though he had never cared to make gold or fame with it, there was in everything that this man did or said the indefinable charm of that originality and that poetry which are called for want of a better definition by the name of genius.

And I had dared to think my poor little trick of song, which I shared with the blackbird on the cherry bough, had been genius likewise!

I felt ashamed of my presumption. I had only talent—a facile and delicate talent enough, but nothing that was higher. My song was pure and flexile, and could reach with wonderful ease high and far, as the stroke of a bell sounded on high over a sunny, still country.

But it was no more than the bird's gift as it sings under the pink cherry-blossom.

CHAPTER VIII.

École Buissonnière.

It won me much love, however, amongst the people.

Amongst the people and the little troop of Pascarel I was most often spoken of by my old Veronese name of L'Uccello.

Although he would never let me act, he now and then permitted me to sing to his audiences.

Whenever he did give his consent, which was but rarely, I used to run on to the little stage with rapture, and look down on the multitude of swarthy,

eager, admiring faces with a delight that was half childishness and half vanity.

They were good teachers, too, in this careless école buissonnière, those little knots of the Italian populace, unerring in their censure of any imperfection, enthusiastic in their welcome of any excellence.

They gave me stimulus and strength; it stung me to be hissed for a false half-note by some black-browed pewterer or some open-eyed taverner's boy. In much these people were my masters, by accuracy of ear and facility of execution; and the roughness of their inexorable criticism, joined with the sincerity of their hard-won homage, completed for me the musical education which Ambrogio had so well commenced.

Now and then it so happened that I pleased them so well, that when the little curtain dropped they would break in gay riot on to the stage, and bear me off in the midst of them, covering me with flowers, and shouting vivas through the quiet of the scattered village and the moonlit fields.

Poor old Uccello! I thought of him often as his country people hailed me by his name.

Of all the poetic figures of the Cinque Cento there is surely none more pathetic than his; going so timidly about in the midst of the great, gorgeous, busy, passionate Florentine life, absorbed in the one vast conception, with which scarce any man ever credits him; painting on the walls of his humble home the likenesses of the animals which he loved so well and was too poor to keep; living with his birds that fluttered for ever round his patient head, as he sat and worked out the immeasurable gifts which the

world takes at his hands without once thinking of the giver.

"Ah, mia cara! Si voi sapevete quanto la Prospettiva m'è dolce!"

How one hears the gentle words sighed out in the long nights, of whose cold and sleeplessness the old man felt nothing, as he dreamed over his one priceless discovery.

And in his life Florence knew him not; Florence laughed at him; Florence only saw in him a meek, quaint, fanciful, timid soul, good for very little in the victorious city.

There were only his birds that knew, his birds that talked with him and solaced him, we may be sure, even as their brethren did St. Francis.

The good and sad old Uccello!—I used to think of him often, very often, when the people shouted his name about me after I had pleased them with my voice, as we went homeward from the theatre in the summer nights with the olive shadows all alive with fireflies, and the stretching plains of millet white as the waves of a starlit sea.

The adoration of me under my old Veronese name that the villagers gave me far and wide, inspired me with many strong desires to show myself upon his stage in the towns and in the cities to a hushed many-coloured crowd as I had done in the Cathedral Square at Verona.

But to this wish Pascarel showed himself inexorable.

It was all very well to sing in some little homely paese amongst the hills, or amidst the fields in Tuscany, or the Adrian Romagna, in my amber and purple

skirts, when there was no one there to hear but the contadini off the farms, or the straw-plaiters, and stone-cutters of the village. These were my nights of triumph.

But all the same, I aspired to some wider sphere. I wanted to be heard in the cities. I wanted to take my share in amusing the larger crowds, when we paused in the alpine shadows of Milano, or amidst the Romanesque wonders of Ravenna, or beneath the aërial and gorgeous pinnacles of S. Marco.

But of this Pascarèl would not hear.

"No, donzella, it is not for you," he would answer; and I found it of no avail to urge my cause; for Pascarèl was too Italian not to have a woollen thread of obstinacy running here and there through the soft bright-coloured velvets of his temperament.

"Why is it not for me?" I said, one day, as we came down from San Marcello and went on our way towards the little town of Pistoia.

We were that day at Gavinana, I remember; having gone up under the chestnut trees, over the rocky road, in the bright coolness of early morning.

The heavy June rains had swelled the mountain streams that were tumbling and foaming with delicious sound far below in the Rio Gonfio. The broad green lawn of the Vecchetto under its deep chestnut shade was lonely and wet and fragrant, as though it had never been steeped red in the blood of the last Republic, and in the grove of the Doccio the thrushes were singing where once there had shivered the lances of Florence.

We had been talking of those times when the tower chimes of the little castello had all rung loudly

a stormo, and where the shady grass-grown market-place, that now only echoed with the tinkle of a mule's bell and the splash of its quiet fountain, had heard the savage shouts of Spain, as great Ferruccio fell pierced with a thousand wounds from pike and arquebuse, and thinking to the last of Florence.

We had been talking of all these times as we sat at our simple meal of bread and wine and melons, under the ancient chestnuts, and Pascarel had been sighing, as was his wont, that his lot had not been in those vivid and virile days.

"There was so much more colour in those days," he had said, rolling a big green papone before him with his foot. "If, indeed, it were laid on sometimes too roughly. And then there was so much more play for character. Nowadays, if a man dare go out of the common ways to seek a manner of life suited to him and unlike others, he is voted a vagabond, or, at least, a lunatic, supposing he is rich enough to get the sentence so softened. In those days the impossible was possible—a paradox? oh, of course. The perfection of those days was, that they were full of paradoxes. No democracy will ever compass the immensity of Hope, the vastness of Possibility, with which the Church of those ages filled the lives of the poorest poor. Not hope spiritual only, but hope terrestrial, hope material and substantial. A swineherd, glad to gnaw the husks that his pigs left, might become the Viceregent of Christ, and spurn emperors prostrate before his throne. The most famished student who girt his lean loins to pass the gates of Pavia or Ravenna, knew that if he bowed his head for the tonsure he might live to lift it in a pontiff's arrogance

in the mighty reality and the yet mightier metaphor of a Canosa. The abuses of the mediæval Church have been gibbeted in every language; but I doubt if the wonderful absolute *equality* which that Church actually contained and caused has ever been sufficiently remembered. Then only think how great it was to *be* great in those years, when men were fresh enough of heart to feel emotion and not ashamed to show it. Think of Petrarca's entry into Rome; think of the superb life of Raffael; think of the crowds that hung on the lips of the Improvisatori; think of the influence of S. Bruno, of S. Bernard, of S. Francis; think of the enormous power on his generation of Fra Girolamo! And if one were not great at all, but only a sort of brute with stronger sinews than most men, what a fearless and happy brute one might be, riding with Hawkwood's Lances, or fighting with the Black Bands! Whilst, if one were a peaceable, gentle soul, with a turn for art and grace, what a calm, tender life one might lead in little, old, quiet cities, painting praying saints on their tiptoes, or moulding marriage-plates in majolica! It must have been such a great thing to live when the world was still all open-eyed with wonder at itself, like a child on its sixth birthday. Nowadays, science makes a great discovery; the tired world yawns, feels its pockets, and only asks, 'Will it pay?' Galileo ran the risk of the stake, and Giordano Bruno suffered at it; but I think that chance of the faggots must have been better to bear than the languid apathy and the absorbed avarice of the present age, which is chiefly tolerant because it has no interest except in new invented ways for getting money and for spending it."

Then, moralising thus, he had sliced the papone, and we had made our morning feast before the matins bell had rung over the little ancient deserted town.

The birds had been singing under the broad green leaves above our heads, the sunshine was sweet and clear upon the old towers and the worn grey stones; in the stillness the little torrents made sad rushing sounds; across the piazza went an old monk and a little barefoot child with her arms round a golden pumpkin.

That was all—all—where once the last battle of free Florence had been fought out and lost.

It was one of those tranquil, innocent, joyous days, which had so little in them, and yet so much, days of bright weather, of tireless feet, of innocent dreams, of unspeakable gladness, days when the whole land was before us to stray at fancy, and the people made us welcome from the one sea-shore to the other.

When our morning meal was over, and the wrinkled rinds of the melons flung to the black pig that had strayed out of a house by the church and borne us company, sniffing for chestnuts where the last javelin had pierced Ferruccio, we left the little town upon its spur of wooded rock, and sauntered out by the Porta Piavana down the leafy ways to Pistoia, whither the Arte had gone on backs of mules before us, and where Pascarel intended to act that night.

Pistoia was but a small place, but it was in a humble way a city, and the people a month or two before had made a fus with me there, and had gathered under the casement of the locanda to listen to me

singing within, and had cheered and applauded me half through the night.

I begged to be seen on the stage there, but Pascarèl was, as on all other occasions, inexorable.

"Why is not for me?" I argued with him. "Surely it is good enough for your sister, why is it not good enough for me?"

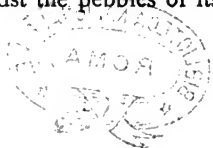
His face flushed, and as we walked along the road, by the foaming water, he cut impatiently at the tall canes that grew by the side of the stones.

"What has that to do with it?" he answered me. "Brunóttà is a silly little thing, whose feet are the cleverest part about her; she cannot read, she cannot be harmed, she is happy in her humble estate. But you—in time to come—be a great singer, if you will. There will be nothing to hinder you. But you shall not do your future such an ill-turn as to be seen on my stage whilst you are too young to know all the risk you would run, and all the tarnish you would gain. Besides, your father lives, no doubt, though we find no tidings of him. I do not choose to take the chance of one day being upbraided by him for having allowed his daughter to show herself in a booth amongst strolling players, whilst she was too much of a baby to dream of the life-long injury that she wrought herself."

I walked silently beside him with a swelling heart, and a pride sorely wounded.

A baby!

I consumed my soul in muteness and bitterness, while watching the canes bend and break under his petulant strokes, whilst the Gonfio flashed brownly amidst the pebbles of its precipitous bed.



Then with that instinct of coquetry which comes untaught to every woman in whose face men ever care to look, I turned my head over my shoulder, and glanced at him full in the eyes.

"A baby!" echoed I; "I am a head taller than Brunóttá, and you—you seem to think me woman enough sometimes!"

His eyes flashed into mine a regard so sudden, so subtle, so ardent, that the languor and the fire of it seemed to sweep over me like a sirocco.

He stood still a moment, and caught my hands and kissed them; his own were burning.

We went on by the curving course of the torrent, quite silent till our travel of that day was done.

Oh, glad and gracious days!

I love to linger on them, for they were lightened with the sweetest sunlight of my life. Never since for me have flowers blossomed, and fruits ripened, and waters murmured, and grasshoppers and grilli sung, as in the spring and summer of that wondrous time.

To rise when all the world was flushed with the soft red of the earliest dawn; to go through the breast-high corn at speed, with scarlet poppies clasping the gliding feet; to see the purple wraith of rain haunting the silvery fairness of the hills; to watch the shadows chase the sunrays on the dusky purple of the mountain-sides; to feel the living light of the cloudless day beat as with a million pulses all around; to go out into the lustre of the night aflame with lucciole, until the dark still plains blazed like a phosphorescent sea; to breathe the wondrous air, soft as the first kisses of men's love, and rich as wine with the strong odours of a world of



flowers; these were my joys, joys at once of the senses and the soul.

CHAPTER IX.

The Feast of St. John.

LITTLE BRUNÓTTA had always seemed to me as innocent as mindless, and as happy a thing as any firefly that danced away its little life amongst the boughs of the magnolias and over the fields of maize.

She was supremely ignorant, infinitely good-natured, and always content, humming on her heedless way with all the light-heartedness of youth; and all that buoyancy of nature, which seems to go in exact proportion to the poverty and ignorance of every creature. Brunóttá, with nothing in the world but a pretty face and two twinkling feet that could dance her every night into as much money as would pay for her bread on the morrow, was happy always—as it is not given to any to be happy when once they have become the owners of either mind or gold.

Brunóttá, indeed, when she saw her brother and myself lingering to watch the sunset fires pale into the ethereal luminance of the night, would shrug her shoulders and go in to see that there were enough onions put in the soup, or that the *donna di facienda* did not get at our leathern flask of wine and weaken it with water.

Brunóttá, when he and I were, as she called it, stargazing in some old monastic church where, neglected or forgotten by the world, some painting of Rozzi or Girolano was slowly dropping to pieces in the damp and darkness, Brunóttá would be busy in the tavern

kitchen ironing out her dancing skirts, or standing chattering over all the gossip of the town at the well in the market place with the young men and the old mothers.

Brunóttá, with all her homage for Pascarèl, was not as averse as might have been wished to the coarse compliments of the youngsters of the places we passed through, and on more than one occasion at our coming unexpectedly upon her had shot round the corner of a garden wall, or through the portals of a public building with suspicious swiftness and shyness, leaving to confront us some sturdy contadino in his brown cloak and red shirt sleeves, cracking his whip over his mule's head with a sheepish look of conscious guiltiness.

Brunóttá was certainly only a little plump brown earthen pipkin of commonest clay, and had nothing in common with the fine porcelain of her brother's nature, but she was a little cheery tender soul, full of good-will to all living creatures; and if Pascarèl saw any faults in her he never chid them, but treated her with the habitual indulgence and good-humoured oblivion that he might have shown to a child too much a favourite ever to be rebuked, but too ignorant to be ever consulted or considered.

I held her in sincere affection: she was very good to me, and observed with me always that wondering, deferential homage which she had from the first blended with her cordial familiarity.

"You are a donzella, and Pascarèl says you are not as we are," was her formula always in answer to my expostulations against the services she rendered me and the distance which she would occasionally remember to set between herself and me.

She would trot to and fro untiringly in my service. She would always take care that some daintier fare than their own was prepared for me. And whenever any of her many adorers brought her offerings from the village fairs or fruits off their own little bits of land, she would always bring me the best of it all, and urge me to take it:—"It is worth nothing, signorina, nothing at all; but just to please me!" she would say.

And then I used to pretend to be charmed with the thing—perhaps some hideous paste necklace or some gaudy-flowered handkerchief, which was of no more use to me than the statues in the piazza; and it was all done so honestly and with such good-will that I got to love the little dancer out of sheerest gratitude.

One day she pressed one of these gifts upon me, a choicer one than common, a band for the hair, of the Sicilian fashion, and of real silver. I took it and fastened back my own hair with it as I had seen Sicilian women do; it was really pretty, and I said so.

"Oh, do keep it, signorina!" she urged on me for the twentieth time. "Pray keep it. Look! I have got all these corals for myself—real corals. They suit me very much better. That silver fillet is made too delicate for me. My great coarse black braids would break it; and it looks so pretty just holding-in all that loose gold of your hair."

It was San Giovanni's day; the great feast of the Saint of Florence, a beautiful smiling Midsummer day, with the pleasant breath of a sea-wind blowing through the radiance of its warmth and light.

At sunrise all the chimes were pealing, and all the

high altars were dressed with masses of roses and lilies, and all the city was waking up to one of those days of mingled masses and mirth which are the delight of the Italian popolani.

Our Arte stood brave on the green meadow, where the grass was high along the little stream where Calandrino once searched for the magical stone of invisibility, and that day the theatre had many rivals for the popular favour.

All the lines of the buildings were threaded with gay coloured lamps, to be lit when the night should fall, and all down the cascade woods, under the oaks and the ilex, the canvas of mountebanks' booths, and the bright colours of itinerant shows, and the little dainty bell-tents of the vendors of bibiti and berlingozzi were ranged one on another in a pretty pleasure camp.

All the day long the people were threading the streets and the woods with that pleasure in the simple sense of sunshine and of sociability which is characteristic of the Tuscan temperament.

All the day long we wandered and laughed, and chattered and sang songs, and ate and drank under the trees, and watched the humours of the crowds.

Now big Brindellone rolled on his old historic way; now a squadron of cavalry swept through the sunlight; now a bespangled acrobat turned somersaults above the pines; now the athletes raced each other round the circle; now a negro climbed into the highest foliage to set the lamps amongst the boughs; now a troop of children danced, with great bouquets in their hands, to the music of some piping flute and

fluttering lute that heralded some saltimbank's performance.

And everywhere the grass blew, and the ilex shadows flickered, and the magnolias opened pale and cool in the heat, and the lovers wandered away down the dim green aisles, and the mountains were dreamily blue, like the iris in Maytime.

San Giovanni's day—old as the walls of Florence, dear to her since the earliest time that she ceased to be a pagan, and was baptised a Christian queen in the old basilica that is still sacred to the seer of the Syrian Desert.

San Giovanni's day,—it was the very heart and core of Florence life,—the very pearl of the people's traditions.

Its lines of fire trace the battlements no more, and no more glitter on the moonlit water; it is dying slowly away, and the city instead is bidden to the Feast of the Statute. But the Feast of the Statute is not the same thing to the people, and the heart of Florence is not in it as it was in the old glories of their own St. John.

But on this day when the Arte stood beneath the Apennines, and we laughed and sang under the ilex shade, San Giovanni's day was in the height of its power, and had no rival, save in old King Carnival, whose kingdom lay buried in the winter snows, and never clashed with the rose garlands and summer sovereignty of St. John.

It was a pagan way of deifying her patron saint, no doubt; but Florence is always half a pagan at heart—she, the daughter of Hercules, who saw the fly-

ing feet of Atalanta shine upon her silvery hills, and heard the arrows of Apollo cleave her rosy air.

She cannot ever altogether forget the old cultus; that laughter of hers is still heathen, an echo of the joyous ages when the symbol of immortality was the butterfly on the brow of Psyche.

Pascarèl, who was all pagan, laughed his glad way through the day, enjoying and scattering enjoyment broadcast; telling fortunes, selling wares in the fair, pelting the children with confetti and ciambellini; playing dance tunes on his mandoline; leading the songs over the barrel of chianti broached in the shade of the ilex, whilst half a kid smoked by a gipsy fire, and purple plums and cherries of Prato tumbled out of dusky rush baskets, and the great Cavolo, who is a titular divinity in Italy, slept in rotundity and benignity in the smoking soup-pot with his court of garlic and of beans around him.

Italy has three kings—Cavolo, Carnivale, and Comerò,—and between them the reign of the seasons is joyous all over the land.

But Pascarèl would not have been Italian soul and body as he was if, with all his gay good-humour, and his sunny elasticity of temper, passion, fierce and swift as the lightning's play, had not slumbered in him to be roused when occasion served.

Though I had wandered with him these four months and more, I had seldom seen him out of temper—never seen him fairly angered. But St. Giovanni's day showed me a little what his wrath could be.

Little Brunóttá excited it early in the morning, when she tripped like a little sparrow down the green

glades of the woods in her brightest holyday gear, with heavy silver ornaments about her, and the glories of a new rose-coloured kirtle flashing in the sun.

"One loves the very name of the day," said Pascarèl, as we walked along under the limes that were all in flower, with here and there shining a white rose-laurel, and here and there glowing a red pomegranate-tree all in blossom. "One loves the very name of the day, if it were only for Ariosto. It was on a St. John's day that he saw Alessandra Benucci, with the vine-leaves on her robes, and the laurel on her golden hair, coming through these very streets of Florence with the strong June sun bright upon her, as the town went mad with joy because Leo and the Palle had won the triple crown. The dear Ariosto was a swift lover, no doubt, and a bold, and a most inconstant; we have his own word for it. How could a man be otherwise who saw in fancy that face of Angelica asleep under her bower of wild roses? She must have paled all living women—that perfect creature who brought Sacripant from the Circassian hills, and Agrican from the Caspian seas, and made a fool of even the great Paladin himself."

"What is the good of talking so about a creature in a poem that never existed at all?" said Brunótta, who had so little imagination in her that it was hard at times to believe in her nationality. "*We*, too, met on St. John's day; you remember that night, Pascarèl?"

"Do you remember this day three years?" she cried to Pascarèl, who had remained silent. "What weather it was!—and all that press of people on the bridge—and how frightened I was because the fire-

works hissed—and how you came behind and took me by the waist and lifted me down into your boat—and I took you for some great lord, Pascarel; do you remember, because you spoke so softly, and your white coat was so fresh and clean——.”

“I remember!” said Pascarel, with petulance, cutting the leaves with his cane as he went.

“Took him for a lord!” I cried. “What, did you not know him, then?—did you not recognise him?—how was that?”

Brunotta laughed gleefully.

“Why, it was the first time I saw him!” she cried, and then stopped short in the middle path of the green stradone, and stood blinking at him and me with half-shut, frightened, shy, cunning, pretty brown eyes.

Pascarel stifled a half-dozen oaths under the droop of his moustaches.

“I had been a wanderer so long,” he said, coldly, “and Brunotta had never left her foster-mother and her village away there in the Casentino, and knew nothing except the names of her goats and the trick of her straw-plaiting. Come on quicker, donzella, or we shall miss the start of the Barberi.”

I hurried on at his desire, and Brunotta followed, penitently murmuring into the ear of Cocomero. I felt that there was some secret connected with this day of St. John.

The little scarlet-mantled, brown, saucy thing followed us, sulkily, like a scolded child; and by the glance of her, restless and cunning, I saw that she had done something amiss of which she was conscious; but I was too happy to weary myself much with conjecture; what did anything really matter after all?—

the sun of Florence was shining above head, and Pascarèl laughed beside me.

Now, as we went along, her silver and corals glimmered bravely on her brown throat and arms, and the band that she had given me caught the sunlight in the avenue as it glistened beneath the lace veil, which, to pleasure Pascarèl, was always cast about my head in Genoese fashion, in preference to any other head-dress.

Pascarèl's eyes flashing uneasily from her to me as we hurried to see the riderless horses start from the gates, caught for the first time the perception of some new ornament upon us both.

He paused suddenly in the midst of the green walk, whilst the other pleasure-seekers streamed on unnoticed.

"Where did that trinket come from, donzella?" he asked me, the swift Italian anger lighting up his eyes.

"Brunótta gave it me this morning," I answered him, attaching no import to the answer.

But he apparently attached much, for he turned sharply round upon her as she followed us with the two lads.

"And who gave it to you, Brunótta?" he asked. "And how came you by those silver and coral gew-gaws that are all new on you I see?"

Brunótta flushed under her sun-burnt skin, and shifted herself uneasily on to one foot like a little ruffled duck ill at ease.

"Rossello Brùn gave them to me," she muttered.

"Rossello Brùn! And who, pray, may that be?" asked Pascarèl, pausing there under the ilex shadows,

with the angry light increasing in his eyes, and a restless impatience betraying itself on all his flexile features.

"Annunziata Brùn's brother, the sailor. He is with his people a little while, in the Sdruciolò," murmured Brunóttà, with her heart fluttering in her mouth. "I had a bit and drop with 'Nunziata yesterday when you were in the botteza with the signorina over all that ugly pottery; and Rossello is a fair-spoken, honest man, and he had just come from Sicily and brought the things; and he had seen the donzella in the street with you, and thought her handsome, and he has been friends with me for ever and ever so long. And the corals and things were for me, and that silver fillet for the signorina. And where is the harm? I am sure there is no harm. Other women take all they can lay their hands on——"

"And since when have you been in the practice of imitating them?" asked Pascarel.

I should not have thought that his voice could have sounded so sternly, or that his eyes could have had so fierce a flame in them as they had now where he stood before the palpitating and frightened Brunóttà.

"Have you taken gifts before?" he asked at length, when he had waited some time for her to speak.

Brunóttà shifted herself on to the other foot, and put one little plump finger in her rosy mouth like a chidden baby.

"Not often," she muttered at last; but it was easy to see the denial was a lie, and a lie not easy to tell,

with that full sunlight and those searching eyes falling relentlessly upon her.

Her glances were roving restlessly from place to place, going in every direction, rather than encounter the gaze of Pascarèl; and suddenly the sullen, embarrassed trouble on her face cleared; a look of eager relief lightened it; she espied an object upon which to divert the anger of the moment from herself.

"There is poor Rossello!" she said, with the coolest treachery in the world. "Go and scold him—his is the fault; not mine!"

With a true woman's justice she surrendered her accomplice to cause a diversion in her own favour.

She pointed out as she spoke a brown, loftily-built man in a sailor's dress, who stood amongst a troop of people round a pole, on which a spangled acrobat was climbing; the sailor affected to be absorbed in the gymnastics, but his restless, glittering eyes roved ever and again from the meadow where he stood to the avenue in which we were pausing.

Pascarèl, without a word, lightly loosened the trinkets off Brunóttà's throat and wrists, and invited me, by a gesture, to unfasten the band from my hair; with all the ornaments in his hands, he swept out of the stradone and across the pasture on which the tumblers and climbers were performing hard against the old pozzo of Narcissus.

We stood motionless, and following him with our eyes; a vague fear fell upon us all, and Brunóttà, who always wept easily, began to shake her little shoulders and sob.

"He will kill him, as like as not," whispered Cocomero, to whom it seemed the passions of his chief

were not unknown terrors and tragedies. "Do you not remember, Brunóttá, that day two years ago when he was angry at Ravenna?—he as good as murdered the count for kissing you in the fair, and throwing him a gold piece for payment?"

Brunóttá sobbed aloud that she remembered only too well, and that the count had meant nothing but courtesy, and that it was terrible to have to deal with a man all lightning and gunpowder as Pascarel was if only a word went wrong.

Meanwhile, across the sunny green meadow, strode Pascarel, with that habitual action of his, which was as swift as a bird's, and as light as a woman's.

We stood and watched, powerless and breathless. There was the lofty pole of the acrobat, the climber aloft in a blaze of spangles, a particoloured crowd staring upward, a belt of green boughs, and in the midst of it all the figure of the marinaro.

Pascarel cut through the throng as a sickle through wheat, and went straight to where the sailor was, and tossed the trinkets into his face.

The chattering of the eager crowd drowned every word he spoke, but a space between the gymnast and his spectators left the forms of Pascarel and of Ros-sello Brùn plain before us in the sunlight.

The Sicilian stood like one stupefied for a moment, bewildered, no doubt, by the sudden flash of the ornaments in his eyes; then the silver and the coral fell together in a little heap on the turf, and the sailor snatched a long knife from his girdle.

We saw the naked blade of it, like a snake's tongue, glitter in the hot keen air.

The people did not see; they were staring upward

at the acrobat, and discussing furiously with one another the chances there were that the pole would break beneath him, and the pole was at that instant bending like a reed, and the poor clown was in jeopardy; and the Florentines had neither eyes nor ears for any other thing than that reeling mast against the trees, and the gambling that they were rejoicing their hearts with on its hazards.

We alone, left in the stradone, saw that deadly flash of the southern steel.

Brunóttá screamed, and hid her eyes, and fell upon her knees, crying to the Virgin; but I said nothing.

I stood and gazed with wide-opened eyes, unblenching, like one turned to stone.

Before the dagger could sheath itself in his breast Pascarel, with one of his lithe and subtle movements, sprang and caught the sailor's arm in the air, and held it there fixed as in a vice. Then, throwing his other arm round Rossello, he wrestled with him and flung him backwards on the turf with a dull, hollow crush that resounded above all the glad tumult of the people's wagers.

He twisted the knife out of the Sicilian's hand, snapped it across his own knee, and tossed the fragments across the meadow.

Then he walked back to us through the sunshine, calm and colourless, and with no trace of anger on his face, singing half aloud to himself as he came the burden of one of my songs.

"Do not take things again, Brunóttá," he said, gently. "It is bad for those who give them to you. That pole there will not break, though the people

would give their souls it should. Let us go and see the Barberi."

"But you might have killed him!" I murmured breathlessly, clinging to his arm in terror still.

He smiled down into my face.

"Altro! Of course I might have done, and I shall probably be very sorry that I did not before the sands of life are run out with me. But you see, signorina mia," laughed Pascarel, "Florentines were always magnanimous, that is well known. Don't you remember the great Asses Bell that tolled day and night for a month before we went to war 'for greatness of mind, that the foe might have full time and warning to prepare himself.' To be sure, Semifonte, and the Ambona, and a few other little trifles are to be set up against our generosity; but what would you?—even Florentines are human."

No one had interfered.

To an Italian combat seems the natural issue of any quarrel, and a murmur went through the crowd of "jealousy!" which explained the action to the satisfaction of all.

Rossello Brùn accepted his beating quietly, if he resolved in himself to take vengeance some dark night in a lonely passage-way; and Pascarel's passion, as transient as it was violent, left no trace on him to mar his sunny and good-humoured enjoyment of the day.

Jealousy?

As I heard the whispered word pass from mouth to mouth in the laughing sightseers, I felt my cheek burn and my heart beat high. No man is jealous of his sister; so then his wrath had been for me?

It was pleasant for me to think so; pleasant with a sweet, tumultuous, unrestful wonder that I could not altogether understand, but that made the rest of San Giovanni's feast hours burn brighter than any that had gone before.

I remember in the fair under the trees Pascarèl that afternoon bought Brunóttà, to console her, a gorgeous necklace of silver and great amber beads, with a medallion of the Madonna, gleaming in many colours, suspended from the chain. But for me he only bought a beautiful ivory-white magnolia, just opened, with all the spices of Asia in its breath.

"It is a cup fit for the King of Thule," said he, as he handed it to me.

The necklace cost several lire, and the flower but a copper piece; but I would not have changed my magnolia for all the jewels that ever gleamed in Golconda.

CHAPTER X.

On the Hills.

SOMETIMES there would be brought a message to Pascarèl from some old rambling white castello set on a hill slope, with all its treeless mountain side bare and brown as a man's hand—a message bidding him come up thither and amuse its duca or cavaliere, where he yawned through the listless day, in the old, vast stone chambers, with no sound to break the monotony of the hot hours, except the shrill saw of the cicala and the fall of the water in the fountain in the court.

But Pascarèl never would obey that sort of summons.

"The signore can come to me," he would answer to the messenger, and send him back as he had come, along the blinding bleak ascent to the old villa where it stood with blistered walls in the midday sun.

"Dio! Not I, if I know it!" he would say to Brunóttá, who always would fain have gone up to the great house, as she urged that there was sure to be good chiante and savoury messes steaming and stewing somewhere towards three o'clock in the day; and Brunóttá was of opinion with the Giant Morgante that dinner at least was no dream.

"Toil up that hill in the sun," he would reply, "to make a bow to Don Antonio or Ser Lorenzo, as he stirs out of his siesta after a surfeit of quails?—what! heat and fuss oneself before sunset over French droleries and Florentine oddities in the face of his *Illustrissimo*, to be rewarded with a yawn and a concession that one is not so very poor, after all, for a strolling player, and a little pitiful wonder that one has never tried one's fortunes at the Logge theatre? Not I, if I know it. If *illustrissimi* want to crack their sides with laughter, let them come down into the valley to my little wooden house, and see if I can make them do it there. I shall never go to them, that is certain."

And he never did: having a good infusion of obstinacy in his disposition, and, along with his Florentine republicanism, some lingering reluctance, no doubt, more or less strong in him, for the last of the once mighty Pascarélli to bend his body as a comedian, and tune his mandoline in old houses in which his fathers had feasted as equals or harried as conquerors.

The Pascarèlli had been cut down, root and branch, stem and twig, centuries before, in one of those ruthless and complete destructions by massacre, and exile, and confiscation with which so many of the histories of the old territorial races end abruptly, like great hardy oaks uprooted and smitten through and through, and blackened to the youngest crown of leaf by a thunderbolt.

It was all a thing of the past—such a far, far away past, too; it was all emptiness, rubbish, weakness—anything contemptible and absurd that you might choose to call it. So he said.

But all the same, Pascarèl, who had fought for the coronet on the smelting-pot when he was a little bare-legged rogue, scouring the country from fair to fair, Pascarèl had something of the pride of race in him; and he would not go up to villa or castello, no, not if it were ever so, to pleasure the noble yawning there among the vine shadows on the marble floors, in the long, hot days when the very lizards seemed to pant in the cracks of the earth, and the very stones seemed to shiver in their whiteness and their nakedness because no moss would cover and no dew would cool them.

Sometimes the “*illustrissimi*,” nothing daunted nor offended, did come down from their hill fastnesses or their olive thickets to the fair or the festa, where their peasant folk were laughing their hearts out in the little wooden house of Pascarèl, and they would pay their money and enter and laugh too, which they were welcome to do, as far as he was concerned, though the populace would as soon have been rid of them.

Life was very dull, no doubt, in those long sum-

mers to those noble people in those vast dusky, silent dwellings up there on the bare-swept side of some spur of the Apennines or the loneliness of some Friulian or Emilian hollow, lined grey with olives, as a bird's nest with sheep's wool.

Life was very dull, no doubt, to them, watching the waste amongst their vines, or chronicling the cones of their silkworms, there in the old places where their fathers had rioted with Ezzelino as the slaughter went on in the cells of St. George, and had ridden love-raids in Sicida with the Biandrati.

Life was very dull, no doubt; and now and then some one of them would find his way into the little theatre glimmering brightly with its oil lights under the silvery moonlit leaves on the edge of some mountain village or hamlet of the marches, and there amongst the stone-cutters, and the vine-dressers, and the goat-herds, would sit and smile at the pasquinades of Pascarel, and call for him as vociferously as the rest, "Fuori! fuori!" when the curtain fell.

Amongst those now and then there would be some obscure lordling with a face like an Attavante miniature, or some young Sordello, fretting his soul in the monotony of his war-wasted and tax-shaven fief; and these would surely find their way behind the little stage to us, and offer to Brunotta many gay compliments, and to me very graceful phrases, backed most likely on the morrow with flasks of montepulciano and great clusters of camellias or magnolia flowers.

Pascarel was wont to break the necks of the good wine with an angry twist of his wrist, and pour it out in a headlong fashion to all the country folk of the

place, touching none of it himself. He always dealt in this mode with any gifts from the villas.

"Let them leave us alone," he would say, impatiently. "They paid their coin at the door, I suppose: there is nothing more needed of them. The wine I want to drink I can buy; and when I can afford to buy it no longer, there is always a public well in every square for any ass to drink at, heaven be praised!"

"Che—e—e—e!" murmured Brunóttá, wonderingly, at such outbursts. "That is odd indeed. You were not like that in the old times, Pascarèl. When the like of those noble lads came, they were welcome, and you would laugh and drink with them just as well as with the others. What is your quarrel now?"

Pascarèl would toss a wrinkled pomegranate up into the sunshine.

"What does it signify? None that I know of: the good townsfolk of Bergamo yonder cut the throats of a hundred odd Calabrians, as you may have heard, because they carved the wings of the fowls in a wrong fashion at supper. We Italians are an unaccountable people. We take our likes and our dislikes hot and strong, and neither gods nor devils can change us."

After which profanity he would slake his thirst with the pomegranate.

One day only he broke through this rule.

At one time, when we were wandering through the hills that lie round the plain in which the little brave walled city of Lucca stands, there came to him many urgent messages from a villa on the mountains praying him to go up thither, because the heir and only son of the house was a child and a cripple, and

could not stir from his threshold to gain any amusement or distraction of his pain.

Pascarèl resisted long, then gave way to the impulse of compassion, which was always stronger with him than any prudential or personal consideration.

So as the sun went down, we left our village where the wooden Arte had been set up under a clump of chestnut-trees, and we took our way along the face of the hills to where the great villa had stood long before in the old days when Lucca had hung upon her tower the chains of her freed Castracani.

Pascarèl had been inclined to leave me in the contadina's cottage which served us for an inn; but I had begged and besought him to let me go with them so eagerly, that he who seldom found the force to refuse me let me have my way, and I walked beside him through the thick, rough herbage full of blue borage, and the white stars of Bethlem, and the many-coloured cups of wild anemones, Brunóttà and the two lads following in our wake, along the side of the hills, where the little, brown, bare mule track wound up, and up, and up into the heights.

Pascarèl had the lute slung across him; and as we went, we sang to it staves of contadini choruses, of love songs, and the like, such as the peasants sang as they guided the oxen through the fields or searched for the aphís in the vine leaves.

Now and then the kids scampered from our path; now and then a puff of blue wood-smoke rose through the branches from some charcoal-burner's cabin; now and then, some great magnolia flower shivered its rosy needles at our feet; far away down below, we could hear the Ave Maria chiming from the church towers

in the plain; above, low rain clouds, fretted and edged with amber, floated near the sun; over all the sky was that wondrous evening hue which is like the soft violet-blue of the iris, and is so clear and yet so mystical, as children's eyes are when they wake from dreams of angels.

We looked up at it through the trceries of the boughs of the cistus, and the ilex, and the fig-tree, and we thought of the skies of Raffael; and we changed the gay allegro of the popular songs to choric thoughts of great Palestrina and antique symphonies of Lasso; and so went along the hill-path in the delicate light, and were glad of heart because the earth was beautiful like this, and we were free to move hither and thither in its soft air as we would.

No northern landscape can ever have such interchange of colour as the Italian fields and hills in summer. Here the fresh vine foliage, hanging, curling, climbing, in all intricacies and graces that ever entered the fancies of green leaves. There the tall millet, towering like the plumes of warriors, whilst among their stalks the golden lizard glitters. Here broad swathes of new-mown hay, starred over with butterflies of every hue. There a thread of water sown thick with waving canes. Here the shadowy amber of ripe wheat, rustled by wind and darkened by passing clouds. There the gnarled olives silver in the sun. And everywhere along the edges of the corn and underneath the maples little grassy paths running, and wild rose bushes growing, and acacia thickets tossing, and white convolvulus glistening like snow, and across all this confusion of foliage and herbage always the tender dreamy swell of the far mountains.

It is only the common country where the oil and wine and corn are pressed and reaped; it goes for leagues and leagues and leagues, over many a perished city and unrecorded battle field, everywhere where the soil is tilled between the mountains and the sea; it is simple and lowly enough, and no poet that I know of has sung it; but it is beautiful exceedingly, and its hues would be the despair of any painter.

The villa was high upon the mountain side—vast, dusky, crumbling, desolate without, as all such places are, and within full of that nameless charm of freedom, space, antiquity, and stillness, that does no less perpetually belong to them.

Where these old villas stand on their pale olive slopes, those who are strange to them see only the peeling plaster, the discoloured stone, the desolate courts, the grass-grown flags, the broken statues, the straying vines, the look of loneliness and of decay.

But those who know them well love them and learn otherwise; learn the infinite charm of those vast silent halls, of those endless echoing corridors and cloisters, of those wide wind-swept, sun-bathed chambers, of those shadowy logge, where the rose glow of the oleander burns in the dimness of the arches; of those immense windows wreathed with sculpture and filled with the glistening silver of olive woods, and mountain snows, and limitless horizons; of those great breadths of sunlight, of those white wide courts, of those tangled gardens, of those breezy open doors, of those wild rose trees climbing high about the Ætrurian torso, of those clear waters falling through acanthus leaves, into their huge red conche; of that sense of

infinite freedom, of infinite solitude, of infinite light, and stillness and calm.

A stranger will see but the nakedness of the place, and the sadness thereof, by reason of its impoverishment and of its age; but let him wait a little in that marble silence where the cicada rings from dawn to eve, let him wander a little in those peaceful ways where the lemon boughs are golden against the monastic walls, let him live a little in that liberty of air and sunshine where the vines uncurl in the drowsy warmth and the tulips spread a thousand colours to the sun, let him rest a little in it all, and after awhile all other places will seem surely to him dark and narrow, and gaudy and full of noise, and in their hues and substances soulless and meagre, and a little coarse, beside the old white villa on the silent olive hills.

It belonged to a great family, and the old chambers were still full of ancient and costly treasures; though the outside walls had long been peeled bare by the sun and the winds, and weeds might grow as they would amongst the oleanders and camellia trees on the stone terraces.

Italy cannot be trim and smirk in modern wise and modern gear; half muse, half mænad as she is, with the thyrsus and the calliope in her hands, and her feet scorched by the smoke of war, she can neither deck herself with theatric paint and power, nor gird herself with a housewifely care and prudence.

The wild vine on her blown hair, the old Etruscan gold on her bare breast, the tangle of knotted ivy cast about her loins, the snow of the field-lilies wreathing

her beautiful bruised arms,—these are her only ornaments.

Let her alone with them.

She is best so.

CHAPTER XI.

The Hobble of Lead.

WE went into the great open court of the villa just as the last sun rays died away behind the hills; Pascarel flicking his mandoline into harmony with the lazzarone song which he was humming to himself.

They brought us wines and meats in the great breezy loggia, where the fig leaves curled around the dull tawny gold of the traventine cornice.

The moon rose; all ate and laughed and jested; the old servants stood and looked on and gossiped and laughed too; great puffs of odour were blown, by a light breeze, from the magnolias.

This is how one lives in Italy, sauntering, talking, idling, dreaming, always in the open air, always amongst the flowers, always finding the people ready to lean their arms on an old wall and exchange some good-humoured chit-chat while the lizards run in and out the stones and the nightingale sings in the ilex leaves.

Then we went within to the central hall, where the raised platform built for musicians was to serve us as a stage. When all was ready we saw that though the lad of the house was a cripple, indeed, who was carried in on his couch by a servant, the villa was at that moment full of gay people strayed

over from the baths in the hills above Lucca and from the sea places of Spezzia and Livorno.

As Pascarèl watched the hall fill with them from behind the screen that was drawn across our stage, a dark displeasure flushed his face; he saw that he had been tricked into coming thither to arouse a set of idlers. But there was no help for it; he had agreed to play, and play he did in two of his own briefest, wittiest, gayest, most sparkling and most satirical pieces.

"But you shall not sing for them, donzella," he said with an oath in his throat. "You shall not sing a note for them, that I swear."

I who was proud of my talent in that way, and had set my heart on displaying it to those brilliant looking persons, was sorely chagrined at his decision, and had I loved him less I should have rebelled against it.

As it was, I sat in mute unwilling submission on a stool behind the screen, through the chinks of which I could see the great dim hall, the oil-lamps, the group of noble people at the farther end, the doorways filled with the eager faces of the household, the high windows open to the night, and the pale flood of moonlight that poured through them across the marble floor.

Perhaps in the solitude of those chesnut woods idlers ceased to be critical; or perhaps the genius of Pascarèl and the mirth of him swept languor and apathy before it, as fogs are swept away by sea winds.

Whichever it was, as he played to them, they were stirred to almost as much enthusiasm as though they

were his general audience of vine-dressers and pewterers and cobblers and shepherds; first in his comedietta, where the irony bit as sharply as aquafortis, and then in a bright, airy, satirical grotesque, graceful sort of masque, in which all his little troop were concerned and in which he was wont to improvise the most stinging verses that would suit the humour of the moment, with all the skill and all the salt that ever Lorenzo Cavelli himself could have displayed when he lampooned the Tedeschi from under the old three-cornered hat of Tuscan Stenterello.

And yet very bitter were his rhymes that night; showered in profusion from his flexile lips like almond blossoms shaken downward in an April breeze.

Very bitter;—I was not sure why;—perhaps because he had been thus entrapped into beguiling the lazy hours of a few rich people, or perhaps because it struck him a little hardly that he should come as a strolling player into old feudal places where the Pascarelli Princes would have only come with a herald's note of defiance and a flutter of the Red Lily on a white standard in the sun.

Whichever it was, or whether both in one, it gave an additional burnish to the gold coinage of his wit that night; he had never been keener, subtler, swifter, and he strung his glittering pasquinades together on the finest silken chord of decorous derision.

"A clever rogue," I heard one of the villa people say, when they leaned on their couches in the shadow of the great vine-canopied windows, and another assenting, murmured back:

"Beaumarchais and Lemaître in one; what does

he do here strolling with a wooden booth? The fool might make his hundred francs a night in Paris."

Then, the thing being over, they called him again and again upon the platform before the screen which had served for all his scenery, and yet again, not satisfied, summoned him by a servant to go up the hall and speak to them in person.

But thereto Pascarèl gave point blank refusal.

"Go and tell your illustrissimi," said he, "that I bow to them upon the stage because I belong to my public whilst I am in my art; but the moment that I cease to play I cease to be an artist; and with me personally they have no more to do than with his holiest Holiness the Pope."

And when the servant having delivered this message, or more probably having translated it into some politer guise, they sent again and yet again with no happier result; and in the end the illustrious persons themselves being curious as to who could thus so well amuse them without any adjuncts of scenery or decoration, came down the hall to visit this contumacious stroller who deliberately refused to obey the invitation which he should have construed humbly into a command.

Pascarèl received them with the frank nonchalance of his habitual manner, which never varied at any time for prince or peasant. Being a Florentine, he was a little curter, a little cooler with the first than with the last; that was all.

The great persons essayed in all ingenious ways to discover his history and his reasons for straying across the country like a mountebank when he had a talent that would make him welcome on the most

famous boards of Europe. But Pascarel was too truly Italian not to be as impenetrable at some moments as he was transparent at other.

"Tuscan eyes can say everything, or can say nothing," and Pascarel's eyes as well as his lips and his gestures and his inflections of voice were truly Tuscan in this sense.

Had he cared, he could have been as fine and as subtle a master of craft as ever was he who studied men and their motives under the boughs of the Rucellai gardens. But it would have been too much trouble for him, and the rule of his temper was frankness.

Whilst they talked with him they gazed at me while I leaned against the screen.

As I had come to a great house my vanity had led me, careless of the heat, to take out my old gorgeous dress of amber satin and purple velvet, which I kept for feast days and high holyday, loving its richness, its weight, its very incongruousness; treasuring it too a little because I had worn it that day when he had given me the ring of the Fates.

One of the villa guests, a man young and handsome, with a look that was familiar to me in his eyes, paid me many graceful compliments, and gleaned from me much more about the life we led than his friends could gather from Pascarel. Hearing that I sometimes sang in our theatre, and was called *l'Uccello* by the people, he brought the mandoline from a corner where it had been cast down, and eagerly entreated me for one song at least.

I glanced at Pascarel; his face grew very dark.

"You sing to villagers, why not to us?" urged the

foreigner with that look on his face which startled me with some vague remembrance. "It seems to me that your impresario keeps the fairest constellation in his histrionic heaven for his own especial pleasure; that is scarcely just to his audience;—or to the star herself."

The boldness of his eyes and the insolence of his accent gave more meaning to his words than shone upon their surface. Pascarèl listening keenly, though affecting to be in converse with the seigneur of the place, Pascarèl swung round, his changeful eyes flashing and stormy in his wrath; and took the answer from me in hot haste.

"My histrionic heaven does not open its gates for gold. I came to-night thinking to pleasure a sick lad. I find that I was tricked into whiling the empty hours of a herd of idlers. I have given you what I choose, and you shall have nothing that I do not choose. Put the money you would pay me in the poorbox of your chapel, and learn for once, oh, most illustrious, that we of Florence never were docile to dictation yet."

With that sole sudden outbreak of the anger which had been gathering in him all the evening through since he had first seen that he had been decoyed thither on an exaggerated pretext, he swept the mandoline from my lap, signed to the two lads to follow him, and with a salutation to the owner of the villa, took my hand with his gravest grace and led me from the hall.

The people he had thus suddenly abandoned were too amazed or too incensed to follow him. We went out unmolested into the moonlight.

Their servant indeed was sent after him with a

profuse present in money, and even a silver box embossed with the count's own arms; but Pascarel tossed them all back again with so impetuous a disdain and so headlong a torrent of fiery words, that the bearer fled in terror, crying aloud that he never had thought to have lived to see the day when a Florentine would have refused a payment.

After that we went on in silence down the white terrace steps and under the avenues of ilex and cypress, Brunotta in the rear, and shaking her little plump shoulders in pitiful sobs, because she would have had so good a supper if only Pascarel had not been so impetuous; she had seen it all laid out on the table in the loggia, and she had even smelt it too; for the ideas of Brunotta found their paradise in

"Un' oca beurica piu che burre,"

and similar juicy dainties, and she had all Pulci's disdain for

"Qualche fratta frutta,"

and the like poor stuff for supper; being hardly Italian at all in her tastes, except so far as her love of idling and of dancing may be counted to her credit.

Pascarel for once did not attempt to console her, but strode on apace through the gardens. He did not slacken his steps nor speak until he was out of the gates of their vineyards, and once more on the mule path along the side of the hills.

Then he turned to me, for him a little roughly.

"What made you look so much, donzella, at that insolent fool who bade you sing? You were half inclined to do his bidding—too!"

"He had a look of my father in his eyes," I answered him dreamily, still haunted by the vague and shadowy resemblance.

"Ah! what, was that all?" laughed Pascarèl, with a contented sound in his voice.

All! it seemed to me that it was very much.

I was always pursued by the fancy that perchance some day or another those very great people to whom my father undoubtedly belonged would somewhere arise and claim me.

In the old time I had wished it fervently, and spent upon the vision of it many golden hours of fancy, but now it made me shudder a little. No life could seem more perfect to me than the one I led. Even my father himself I had some fear rather than much strong desire of meeting.

"Why were you so angered against them?" I asked him in counter question. "They meant well, I think; and I heard one of them say that with your genius you would make a hundred francs a night in Paris?"

In the moonlight, as he walked beside me, I saw the quick disdain smile on his mobile lips.

"If I could make a thousand—still I should lose my liberty."

"But you would be famous?"

"Famous? Oh yes! About as much so as the bull they decorate for Mardi Gras, and lead about with music, and eat afterwards in stews and steaks. A day's carnival of flowers, and then the chopping-block of the critical butchers, and then annihilation in the teeth of the world's oblivion;—a player's fame lasts

just as long as the bull's. But perhaps—if you wish it, donzella,—perhaps——”

“Perhaps what?”

“Perhaps—one day I will go up for my Mardi Gras and risk my murder afterwards, if you have a fancy to handle my paper laurels in those soft little fingers of yours. Perhaps?—Who knows?”

So we went on along the rough hill-side, and Pascarel recovered the serenity of his temper, and again strains of Pergolesi and of Lasso were heard in the moonlight as we went down through the glistening herbage with the smell of the flowering vines rising up to us from the plains below.

It was midnight when we reached the little village in a cleft amongst the rocks and chestnut woods where our temporary home had been made.

All its small world was asleep. There was no light except where a knot of fireflies burned under the great leaves of the gourds and the pumpkins in the contadina's gardens.

Where our wooden Arte was planted, its red and white flag drooped in the moonlight and the clear drowsy air, as though it were sad to think how in other times its scarlet giglio had been borne in victory aloft over clumps of spears along that plain beneath where Lucca lay.

Pascarel glanced up at his flag as he passed his theatre.

“I told you truly, donzella,” he said, with a certain sadness in his voice, “truly, the night I saw you first, that Art, being once weighed by the gold it brings, changes the Hermes' wings it lent you for an ass's hobble of leather and lead. Like the ass, you

can graze so shackled, but it is all that you can do. Unhappily women always prefer grazing to flying. Sarto's wife has many sisters."

With that he bade me go within, for we had to rise with the sun on the morrow; and as I undressed by the light from the gleaming skies I could hear the little shrill voice of Brunóttà still piping its lamentations over the savoury meats she had lost, and through the casement screen of the vine leaves I could see the shadow of Pascarèl passing slowly to and fro along the slip of turf in front of the porch, thinking his own thoughts, no doubt, of the paper laurels and the hobble of lead.

And all the while the living fires of the lùcciole burned above the green seas of flax and maize, and shone like clusters of fallen stars along the side of Shelley's Serchiò.

CHAPTER XII.

The Legend of the Lùcciole.

"THE pretty lùcciole; one cannot wonder that the poets love them, and that the children believe them to be fairies carrying their little lanterns on their road to dance in the magic circle under the leaves in the woods.

"But you know what the lùcciole really are? No? Oh, for shame!

"I heard it when I was a boy from a dark-eyed woman, with a mouth like a rose, who leaned down from her loggia in the summer-time, and gleaned them from the acanthus coils to set them in her hair.

"The lücciole are just this: they are all the love words that are spoken in Italy.

"For these are so eager and tender and burning that no other land hears their like, as they fall from the lovers' lips in the lustrous moonlit midnights, when the mask is thrown down with the knots of roses, and the ball is left far away and forgotten, and the hands are folded fast in one another, and the soft sighs tremble to silence in the softer warmth of caresses.

"Now, long, long ago, the god Eros, who has always reigned supreme in this land, the god Eros, floating one summer night, as is his wont, from balcony to balcony, from breast to breast, breathing through mortal mouths those amorous ardours, be-thought himself that it was sad that things so beautiful should perish with a breath, and to himself, thus musing, said:—

"‘These murmuring and burning words,—surely they should be deathless, for they are so old, so old, and yet they are so new, and no man's mouth is weary of them, and no woman's ear is tired. They ought surely to live for ever. They are too perfect to die with a breath. See—I whom men call Love—I will give these sweet words wings, and let their fire burn in them like the stars, and fling them out upon the summer nights, and let them live their lives in glory there amongst the dewy darkness of the myrtle and the blush flowers of the wild pomegranate. And so no love word shall be ever lost, but shine amidst the flowers as a lücciola.’

"As Eros said so did he; wherefore the lücciole gleam in millions all through the months of summer

whilst the magnolias shed their rose-flushed arrows on the balconies, and the vine shadows dreamily darken the logge wherever the lovers lean.

"Year after year they burn, tender and fitful fires, along the green garden ways and under the women's casements—deep in a lily's white heart, or high where the rose-laurels climb.

"Some say they die in a day; some say they live on for ages. Who shall tell? They look always the same.

"For are they not winged words of passion—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever?

"And this is the truth of the lùcciole.

"Let him who doubts, walk abroad in the gorgeous nights of the midsummer, when they make pale the red oleander, and light to flame the magnolia whiteness, while the notes of the lute thrill the stillness, and under the shade of the ilex two shadows lean one on the other.

"He will doubt no more then—if he love."

* * * * *

I heard Pascarèl tell this legend a few nights later on in the sultry June weather, when the lùcciole were bright over all the land; sparkling in the grasses, dancing in the boughs, clustering around the corn-stalks, and lighting the chestnut forests.

We were in a little village in the mountains, a little beautiful green nook in a deep gorge with one of the many hill-torrents bubbling and foaming head-long down its rocks. The people had clustered round him at sunset, and had caressed him, and clamoured for a song, a story, a personation, anything; and he, with a touch or two of the mandoline, and leaning his

back against a great castagno tree, had rhymed for them, in the quick improvisation that was at once nature and habit with him, and strung together for this knot of charcoal burners and of quarry workers strings of golden fancies and pearls of wit and wisdom.

All kinds of poetic imaginations and of quaint conceits fell lightly into rhythm off his lips with all the tender, gay, sympathetic humour of Puléi and of Berni in them. He had refused to pleasure the noble idlers in the white villa above the Serchiò, but he begrudged nothing to this little community of rough foresters as they gathered about him under the shadow of the chestnuts with the warmth of the afterglow and the dreamy obscurity of the descending night upon their upturned faces.

Many things that he said may have been obscure to them, for when the mood for speech was on him he forgot all except the thoughts which thronged upon his fertile and lavish fancy. Yet they in a manner understood it all, for the Italian peasant is quickly touched to "fine issues," and has a poetic pathos in him which utters itself in his rhymed *rispetti* and *ritornelli*.

He had chosen the better part, no doubt, since he was so content; in wandering thus amongst his country people he was free as any swallow on the wing. But he had said truly, Sarto's wife has many sisters; to women the crowns of Francis seem ever better than peace of conscience and immunity from care. As I looked at him where he stood under the broad green shadows of the chestnut, with the starlight of the early night upon his face, and the musical, sonorous Tuscan

rhythm coursing off his tongue, I could not but wish that the world knew him as I knew him; that the great people of the great cities should be his auditors rather than these labourers of the mountains and the forests.

I wanted to fasten the gilded string round the foot and draw the brodered hood over the eyes of my free and fearless hawk, in lieu of leaving him to lean on the wild west wind and spread his wings to the sun in full liberty: that is to say, child though I was, I was a woman.

A little later, when he had shaken himself loose from the people, and we were sitting under the chestnuts alone on the edge of the hillside with the lucciole-lightened plain before us, far, far down below, I returned to the old story with which in those days I must sadly and often have teased him. I tried so hard, I know, to persuade him that the hobble of lead was a golden band that fastened only more firmly the pinion of Hermes. But he shook his head and laughed, and would not be convinced.

"What would you?" he said, almost impatient at the last. "I am not the great genius you think me. I am only a wandering idler with a trick of my tongue, that half the peasants in the country share with me, and a whole knapsack of droll, quaint, out-of-the-way fancies as jumbled and, perhaps, as worthless as the odds and ends of a curiosity dealer's barrow.

"I promised you last night to go up for the paper laurels? Nay, 'promise' I never did. I said I might, to please you. But not even to please you, I think,

shall I ever bring myself to go into harness. The nomadic life is what suits me.

"Women do not see the beauty of it—no! They are for ever breaking bounds and roaming in imagination, but it is always into some land flowing with milk and honey, and abounding in creature comforts. Even my divine Angelica never forgot a banquet. Now I do not care for banquets, and I care very much for liberty.

"You cannot alter me, my donzella. Nature cast me in her gipsy mould so many years before ever you were born. It may sound very shocking to say so, but between ourselves I have very little doubt, I assure you, that Menighella's life was a great deal happier than Michelangelo's.

"You know that cheery, simple, merry wanderer whom Michelangelo loved so well? straying over the country with his sketches that the contadini bought at fair and market; his S. Francesco, that the peasants would have frocked in gay colours in utter defiance of fact and the frate; his quaint little saints in pasteboard, and his waxen Christs, for which his illustrious friend gave the models.

"Think of the fanciful pleasant days he had in all the little towns and castella, with his light load of apostles in terracotta and martyrs in millboard; welcome for all the baptisms and weddings and feasts and fairs; and bidden to sup here, drink there, laugh with this one, sorrow with that, according as the people bought a S. Anna to bless a baby's birth, or a S. Petrus to guard a mother's grave.

"Oh, take my word for it, roving, humble, merry Menighella must have been much happier than his

mighty friend, badgered by Pope and council, and hunted by patrons from city to city; besides, the ambulant artist can have been no fool, and must have had a soul in him, or he had never been so dear to Michelangelo."

I listened to him, glad as I was ever of hearkening to the swift sweet music of his voice. It was a perfect night: the forests were still as death; the great moon hung yellow and lustrous as gold above the dark edge of the high mountains.

"But men you honour did not disdain fame?" I said, a little timidly, to him, for I had always of him that soft sweet fear—which yet is not fear—without which no woman's or girl's love is worth a fallen chestnut husk. "Look at your Ariosto! and I think you are as great a poet as he, only you never will write down a word."

He laughed gently.

"As great a poet as Ariosto, because I can string the terza rima at times as an old woman reels thread off her distaff? Oh, my child, you would make me as vain, if I believed you, as the dauber Niccolò Soggè when he dared to challenge Del Sarto.

"It is national in us, that is all, that knack of verse. Jules Janin says somewhere, 'to say an Italian poet, is needless; say an Italian, and the poet is a matter of course.' Now I would not go as far as that, but there is a certain truth in his pretty compliment. We are always poets at heart 'and Romeos when the moon rises.

"It always seems as if that well-spring of poetry and art which arose in Italy, to feed and fertilize the world when it was half dead and wholly barren under

the tyrannies of the Church and the lusts of Feudalism; it would always seem, I say, as though that water of life had so saturated the Italian soil, that the lowliest hut upon its hills and plains will ever nourish and put forth some flower of fancy.

"The people cannot read, but they can rhyme. They cannot reason, but they can keep perfect rhythm. They cannot write their own names, but written on their hearts are the names of those who made their country's greatness. They believe in the virtues of a red rag tied to a stick amidst their fields, but they treasure tenderly the heroes and the prophets of an unforgotten time. They are ignorant of all laws of science or of sound, but when they go home by moonlight through the maize yonder alight with *luciole*, they will never falsify a note, or overload a harmony, in their love songs.

"The poetry, the art, in them is sheer instinct; it is not the genius of isolated accident, but the genius of inalienable heritage.

"It is universal. It is an Easter egg that lies alike in the hands of gentle and simple; not a Roc's egg, that falls from the skies once in a thousand years. Being thus diffused it has ceased to produce individual and conspicuous achievement: but it is this diffusion which—bringing with it a perpetual ideality and an eternal youth—will render possible for us our *Italia Rediviva*."

As he ceased to speak, as though in answer to him, there came from the distance the sound of a man's singing. Down below, through the maize, there was going a little knot of peasants; they carried great bundles of green canes on their shoulders; the

lùcciole flashed from their feet as they passed away into the darkness where their little homes were gathered round a campanile; the voices, softly sighing, died away in the wild sweet love songs that echo all over the land unwritten by any human hand, only passed from mouth to mouth, from age to age, telling the one eternal story.

We listened till all was silent.

He turned to me and smiled.

"Does all poetry want to be written to live? Ah, no! cara mia—not so long as men love."

A soft strange trouble, that yet was infinitely peaceful, stole on me. I sat quiet in the white moonlight and put my hand into my breast and felt for the stone Fates. They were quite warm where they rested against the beating of my heart.

The tears filled my eyes suddenly; sweet tears, and glad; I could not have told whence nor why they came.

"Ah! you are right, you are right," I murmured. "What does fame matter? your life is so beautiful as it is!"

He stretched his hand out and held mine closely, and sighed a little as he answered. His moods were so swift in variation; his fancy was so vivid and so fast; one could never quite be certain whether any mood would last with him much longer than a butterfly may rest upon a flower.

"Ah, dear donzella!" he said, with a sigh, "perhaps, that is too much to say. I am afraid so. It is hard to find a beautiful life in these days; riches are not hard to come by; even success, if one is not too particular as to the roots of it, is moderately easy

likewise; luxury, there is no doubt, was never at any time so general. But beauty——

“Perhaps there was never any kind of life so really beautiful as that of the improvisatore in the middle ages; such as Bernardo Accolti’s for example. What a life that must have been: the sun can never have set on it.

“Roaming the length and breadth of the land, the guest of all that that was most brilliant and most graceful in each city; everywhere the streets garlanded and the shops closed at his coming; everywhere the whole people, from princes to beggars, gathered in the vast squares, in the breathless sunlight, hushed like little listening children at the first words that fell from his lips.

“All the pageantry, all the warfare, all the genius, all the tumult of the age, spread like a wondrous gold-threaded tapestry before him for him to tread on it as he chose. All the passion and the poetry of the era close to his hand like flowers to be woven into his own myrtle wreath as he would. All the nation, from its cardinals to its contadini, like so many chords of an æolian harp, that the breath of his mouth could thrill like the winds of the summer.

“The mountain lord, the brigand chief, the fierce free lance, the begging friar, the weaver and the armourer, the prince-bishop and the Ghetto Jew, the damsel at her lattice, and the page in his satin hose, the Pope’s mistress above in her silk-hung balcony, and the trooper’s leman below with a wound in her ragged breast—all the vast motley of the century his to paint and to sing as he would in the great sun-burnt piazza, with the swallows wheeling against the

blue sky, and on the edge of the listening crowd—who knows?—perhaps the angel face of Raffaele.

“And then always for rest, Urbino, with the breath of the Adrian sea and the breeze of the Apennine hills blowing through its palace chambers, and the night waning on Bembo’s tireless wit, and the morning breaking above the Monte del Cavallo before the Court of Love had solved one half its problems. A beautiful life that, a beautiful life that, if you will.

“I am not sure that I do not envy Bernardo even more than Boiardo, though the fire of his words was quenched with the ashes of his body, and when we read him now, we find him dull as dust, and wonder what the spell was that once held all Rome speechless as he spoke.

“Well, there is a compensation in all things. Bernardo *had* his life: a perfect life surely, if a whole people’s applause, and years that were as one long feast day, count for anything. But Bernardo’s is an empty name now to all save a few scholars who only hold him as a poor stilted sterile fool; and where is the child that has not heard of One who died war-worn, and heartsick, and exiled, alone in Gothic Ravenna?”

His voice sank dreamily into silence.

We stayed there both silent a little while under the chestnut shadows; the wind from the south blew over us on its way to wander over the country of the poets. Then, silently still, we arose and went homeward; the moonlight white about our lingering feet.

I leaned long at my little lattice that night, watching the *lùcciole* where they shone amidst the waves of

millet and amongst the tendrils of the vines; rocking on the bough of a rose, or glancing in clusters where the leaves of the arum grew thickest.

I stretched my hands out and caught one as it went by my casement, and held it, half gladly and half timidly, as a child holds a ladybird that it deems a fairy.

Had it been a love word once on any woman's ear? Had Romeo breathed it, or Paolo? Had it died of its own sweetness, as love will? Had it life eternal, as he said, amongst the roses?

It told me nothing, but burned there; a little star; captured in the hollow of my hand.

I looked at it a little while, then let it go and dance upon the wind.

"What do I want with you?" I murmured to it; "if you be living fires, yet you are dead words. And I have his—all his—for me alone."

Then half ashamed that even the lùcciole should hear me, I shut the lattice, and, whilst my face grew warm as with some noonday fervour of the sun, I stole into my bed and slept and dreamed.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Tomb of the King.

FROM the date of St. John's Day, Brunóttá treated me with coldness and with something that was almost like aversion. Her gifts and goodness to me ceased, and nothing that I could do or say would win a smile from her.

I had noticed sometimes before that when we were with Brunóttá he treated me differently, with more

deference, but with far less tenderness. Before Brunóttá he never kissed my hands, nor let his eyes dwell on me fondly, nor called me all the pretty caressing names that he lavished on me when we were alone.

Sometimes, too, I noticed the bright merry eyes of the little Tuscan watch me with a keen, hard suspicion, and at times she would turn away from us with some little sullen, petulant phrase that was only not satirical because her powers were not equal to more than a childish sulkiness.

But the only result of this change of manner in her was to send her more to the companionship of her favourite Cocomero, who was a good, silly, laughter-loving lad, always comically afraid of the flail of her tongue; and to leave Pascarèl and me more free to wander by ourselves through the vine-shadows of the country sides and the dim arcades of the ancient cities. And I was too glad of this to give the cause more thought.

Cocomero and Brunóttá were so well suited to one another, they loved to wrangle for a lean poulet, to gossip at a village well, to cheapen trumpery at the fairs, to tussle with the tavern keepers, to cheat the guards at the town gates by bringing in a smuggled snipe or water melon.

These were their daily joys; whilst to them Pascarèl and I seemed utter fools, dreaming through the fields content with a bird's song, or wandering for hours in some old silent grass-grown place abandoned by the world, but to us memorable for the sake of some great life that there had opened to the light in the dead ages.

"If it were not for me you would all go without bit or drop from dawn to moonrise," Brunóttá would

cry, displaying some booty from the farms that she had borne into the town under the very noses of the unsuspecting guards at the gateway, and which was made tenfold more sweet to her by the falsehoods and perils which she had incurred in its transit. "A beautiful plump peahen—eating for a prince—and spinach and herbs to garnish it—all for three soldi—worth walking out four miles for any day—things are so dear in the markets. Spinello lived and died here?—and you two have been dreaming over him and Petrarca all day? The Saints help us! What fools are clever folk! And who was he when all is said? A dauber in colour? Oh, I know; his paintings are in the little church—whitewash would look as well, and it kills insects too. A Madonna one must have, of course, but Our Lady I know is quite content with a wax figure of her, and those pretty paper flowers and some coloured tapers—they look much better than the frescoes—Cheche! how fat the hen is!—and all for three soldi, Pascarèl!"

Pascarèl would shrug his shoulders with silent ineffable disdain, and go out into the archway of the house and stand under the vine-leaves, sending smoke into the air with a troubled and impatient contempt upon his face.

They were as far asunder as the poles these two who travelled together, played together, lived and laughed together, and yet never caught sight one moment of each other's souls.

That day he and I let the fat peahen stew on neglected amongst its herbs over the little charcoal pan, and wandered about the old, old streets of Arezzo, talking of Mæcenas and Petrarca and the merry Bacco

in Toscana and thinking wistfully of that noble old cathedral that was levelled with the dust for the war lust of the Medici.

He was sad at heart that day; the contact of Brunnotta's low little soul seemed to have jarred on him; his hours of melancholy were not frequent, but the gloom, when once it settled there, was deep. Sometimes he was curt and full of scorn in it; this day he was gentle, and his eyes dwelt on me with a soft pain in them.

We searched, and vainly, for Spinello's tomb; like the cathedral, it was lost in the summer dust.

There was a tired looking, humble olive, that by its look had grown there beneath the walls five hundred years if one; but all the pomp and beauty of the pagan temple had dissolved like a dream of the night. We sat in the shadow of the olive, and in our fancies rebuilt the temple.

It was full midsummer.

The Tuscan sun was burning in a cloudless heaven. A cloud of swallows were silver in the light. The mountains were soft in hue as rose-leaves. Everywhere in the plains of maize the shrill cicale were loudly singing their rude love odes. Above the grey walls there was a flush of pomegranate flowers, and amongst them there hummed the yellow porselline that the people so prettily say bring happiness wheresoever they rest.

The city so great in Etruscan, in Latin, and in Renaissance days, was very quiet in cloudless sunshine.

It was all bright and hot, northward over the Tuscan olive valleys, and southward, where tawny Tiber dragged his way, deep bosomed in the Umbrian oakwoods.

"It is just the same country," said Pascarel, glancing down north and south. "Just the same scene as when Mæcenas was born here, and Pliny pondered beneath the garden-trees upon the hills yonder.

"The city has crumbled to dust twice, and been rebuilt in new fashions, though the new is now so old that we cannot find Spinello's tomb, but I doubt if the district has changed a whit since Livy wrote of it.

"What a great book a great student might write upon Arezzo! What an epitome in this single town of the Etruscan, of the Roman, and of the Mediæval life! And of the Renaissance alone what countless and various types!

"Fighting ecclesiastical Tarlati; shrewd, gay, merry Redi; our idealic Petrarca; good heavens! one could string great Arezzan names until the sunset!

"The history of this one town might be the history of Italy, and of all its wonderful complexities and contrarieties of character and of circumstance.

"By-the-bye I hear they have found a new Etruscan tomb in that olive orchard where you see the little cloud of people. The tomb of a king they say by his ornaments. Myself I should like to know something of the ornament-makers.

"What manner of men were they those earliest gold-workers whose art is the despair of modern goldsmiths?

"Did they sit in the sun as we do now and hear the cicale chatter? Did they labour for love of the art or greed of the shining metal? Did their hearts

go down to the grave with those chains on those fair dead women?

"What a sad tender grace there is about that old Etruria! A whole nation swept off the face of the soil, and leaving only a few placid dead that melt to dust as the air touches them, and a handful or two of golden chains that neither rust nor time can alter.

"Their temples, their palaces, their laws, their armies, their very history, all have perished; and only these golden toys of theirs live and shine in the modern daylight.

"Ah, Dio mio! how full the world is of wonder! Only its wonders are all the children of Death, and chill us when we touch them."

So he spoke his fanciful thoughts aloud, lying stretched on the hillside, under the walls of the city. His meditations often clothed themselves in that facile and picture-like speech which is national with the Italian; for amongst these people who have all more or less in them of the improvisatore abundant detail and fluent expression are natural as the breath of the lungs and the lips is to others.

"We will go and look when the shadows lengthen at that Etruscan tomb," he said, taking a little lizard in the hollow of his hand. "We shall not find old Spinello's if we hunt all the week.

*'Appena i segni
De l'alte sue ruine il lido serba.
Muiono le città; muiono i regni:
Copre i fasti e le pompe arena ed erba:
El' uom d'esser mortal par che si sdegni.
Oh nostra mente cupida e superba!'*

"His tomb is gone," he pursued, and his voice sounded hushed and sad in the dreaming silence of

the sunny plains. "And that great Latin inscription is trodden somewhere underneath those clods that the bullocks are treading. What does it matter? He had a good life here for ninety years.

"It must have been such a good life—a painter's—in those days; those early days of art. Fancy the gladness of it then—modern painters can know nothing of it.

"When all the delicate delights of distance were only half perceived; when the treatment of light and shadow was barely dreamed of; when aerial perspective was just breaking on the mind in all its wonder and power; when it was still regarded as a marvellous boldness to draw from the natural form in a natural fashion;—in those early days only fancy the delights of a painter!

"Something fresh to be won at each step; something new to be penetrated at each moment; something beautiful and rash to be ventured on with each touch of colour,—the painter in those days had all the breathless pleasure of an explorer; without leaving his birthplace he knew the joys of Columbus.

"And then the reverence that waited on him.

"He was a man who glorified God amongst a people that believed in God.

"What he did was a reality to himself and those around him. Spinello fainted before the Satanas he portrayed, and Angelico deemed it blasphemy to alter a feature of the angels who visited him that they might live visibly for men in his colours in the cloister.

"Of all men the artist was nearest to heaven, therefore of all men was he held most blessed.

"When Francis of Valois stooped for the brush he only represented the spirit of the age he lived in. It is what all wise kings do. It is their only form of genius.

"Now-a-days what can men do in the Arts? Nothing.

"All has been painted—all sung—all said.

"All is twice told—in verse, in stone, in colour. There is no untraversed ocean to tempt the Columbus of any Art.

"It is dreary—very dreary—that. All has been said and done so much better than we can ever say or do it again. One envies those men who gathered all the paradise flowers half opened, and could watch them bloom.

"Art can only live by Faith: and what faith have we?

"Instead of Art we have indeed Science; but Science is very sad, for she doubts all things and would prove all things, and doubt is endless, and proof is a quagmire that looks like solid earth, and is but shifting waters."

His voice was sad as it fell on the stillness of Arezzo—Arezzo who had seen the dead gods come and go, and the old faiths rise and fall, there where the mule trod its patient way and the cicala sang its summer song above the place where the temple of the Bona Dea and the Church of Christ had alike passed away, so that no man could tell their place.

It was all quiet around.

The black and gold demoizelle hummed above in the red pomegranate flowers. The long curling leaves and auburn feathers of the maize were motionless in

the windless air. Beneath the vines great pumpkins shone like gold, and little lizards glanced like emeralds in the light.

It was all so bright, so quiet, so full of sweet summer life, here, where a whole nation had passed away from the face of the earth, leaving but a few crumbled stones as the sum of its story.

"I would rather have been Spinello than Petrarca," he pursued, after awhile. "Yes; though the sonnets will live as long as men love: and the old man's work has almost every line of it crumbled away.

"But one can fancy nothing better than a life such as Spinello led for nigh a century up on the hill here, painting, because he loved it, till death took him. Of all lives, perhaps, that this world has ever seen, the lives of painters, I say, in those days were the most perfect.

"Not only the magnificent pageants of Leonardo's, of Raffaele's, of Giorgone's: but the lowlier lives—the lives of men such as Santi, and Ridolfi, and Benozzo, and Francia, and Timoteo, and many lesser men than they, painters in fresco, and grisaille, painters of miniatures, painters of majolica and montelupo, painters who were never great, but who attained infinite peacefulness and beauty in their native towns and cities all over the face of Italy.

"In quiet places, such as Arezzo and Volterra, and Modena and Urbino, and Cortona and Perugia, there would grow up a gentle lad who from infancy most loved to stand and gaze at the missal paintings in his mother's house, and the cœna in the monk's refectory, and when he had fulfilled some twelve or fifteen years,

his people would give in to his wish and send him to some bottega to learn the management of colours.

"Then he would grow to be a man; and his town would be proud of him, and find him the choicest of all work in its churches and its convents, so that all his days were filled without his ever wandering out of reach of his native vesper bells.

"He would make his dwelling in the heart of his birthplace, close under its cathedral, with the tender sadness of the olive hills stretching above and around; in the basiliche or the monasteries his labour would daily lie; he would have a docile band of hopeful boyish pupils with innocent eyes of wonder for all he did or said; he would paint his wife's face for the Madonna's, and his little son's for the child Angel's; he would go out into the fields and gather the olive bough, and the feathery corn, and the golden fruits, and paint them tenderly on grounds of gold or blue, in symbol of those heavenly things of which the bells were for ever telling all those who chose to hear; he would sit in the lustrous nights in the shade of his own vines and pity those who were not as he was; now and then horsemen would come spurring in across the hills and bring news with them of battles fought, of cities lost and won; and he would listen with the rest in the market-place, and go home through the moonlight thinking that it was well to create the holy things before which the fiercest reiter and the rudest free lance would drop the point of the sword and make the sign of the cross.

"It must have been a good life—good to its close in the cathedral crypt—and so common too; there were scores such lived out in these little towns of Italy,

half monastery and half fortress, that were scattered over hill and plain, by sea and river, on marsh and mountain, from the daydawn of Cimabue to the after-glow of the Carracci.

"And their work lives after them; the little towns are all grey and still and half-peopled now; the iris grows on the ramparts, the canes wave in the moats, the shadows sleep in the silent market-place, the great convents shelter half a dozen monks, the dim majestic churches are damp and desolate, and have the scent of the sepulchre.

"But there, above the altars, the wife lives in the Madonna and the child smiles in the Angel, and the olive and the wheat are fadeless on their ground of gold and blue; and by the tomb in the crypt the sacristan will shade his lantern and murmur with a sacred tenderness:

"‘Here he sleeps.’

"‘He,’ even now, so long, long after, to the people of his birthplace. Who can want more of life—or death?"

So he talked on in that dreamy, wistful manner that was as natural with him in some moments as his buoyant and ironical gaiety at others.

Then he rose as the shadows grew longer and pulled down a knot of pomegranate blossom for me, and we went together under the old walls, across the maize fields, down the slope of the hills to the olive orchard, where a peasant, digging deep his trenches against the autumn rains, had struck his mattock on the sepulchre of the Etruscan king.

There was only a little heap of fine dust when we reach the spot.

When they uncover the dead faces—the faces dead two thousand years—they are always perfect in these Etruscan tombs; but at the first touch of light they seem to shiver; they cannot bear the day; in a moment they dissolve like a snow flower that the sunrays strike; there are only left the golden chains lying in the grey soft dust.

The violated grave yawned under the olive tree; the coffin had been broken open; the peasant had eagerly rifled its jewels; a little throng of people from Arezzo were standing looking at the mound of ashes; the sad silvery olives were all around; above, in the city, there were bells ringing.

We looked too: then went away in silence along the edge of the ripening maize.

The dead king had reigned here on the hills ages ere Rome had been; ages ere Horace had sung of Soracte; ages ere the chariots of Augustus had rolled through the broad amber seas of the Umbrian harvests; ages ere the marshes by Trasimene southward, yonder across the fields, had been red with the slaughter of consul and cohort, and strewn with the fasces and eagles.

The dead king had reigned here; and after two thousand years his nameless dust was rifled for the greed of peasants, and lay friendless in the sun there beneath the olive branches.

We went through the gates in silence.

At our resting-place in the Via dell' Orto, where the eyes of Petrarca had opened to the light, Brunotta met us in the arched entrance, in the rosy evening stillness, with shrill rebuke for her peahen overstewed and spoilt by waiting.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Gold of Etruria.

PASCARÈL played that night in Arezzo. But a strange fancy came to him.

At the last moment, as his turn came for the stage, he flung off his gay dress and abandoned the jesting little piece he was prepared for, and flung the grave Florentine lucco about him, and went before the lamps with only his mandoline.

He struck a few chords of it, tender and far-reaching, that made silence fall on the little crowd of Tuscans and Umbrians that filled the Arte, which was unroofed that night to the breathless summer skies.

Then he began to speak to them, quite quietly at first, with his luminous eyes drooped and full of retrospection, his voice as clear as a bell on the great stillness.

A certain fire of improvisation fell on him, and his words dropped naturally into the swing and measure of the terza rima. Verse to the Italian is natural as laughter to the child or as tears to the woman.

The dust of the dead king under the olive trees outside their gates was his key-note; a note grave and tender, on which his redundant fancy strung every variety of meditation and of metaphor.

All the life of the dead ages revived in his words and gestures.

The lost people of unknown Etruria lived again in his passionate fancy.

"There was a gold worker in Etruscan Arezzo; the delicate metal bent to his hand finedrawn as the thread of a spider's web; he was poor and alone, but quite happy; an old olive grew by his door and he worked in its shade all the day; the gold was in his hands like a maiden's hair, and he talked to it, and wove it, and loved it.

"One day the king's daughter went by, and her horse sought a drink at his well. She rode on and took no thought of him; but his olive was no more the tree of peace by his threshold.

"He haunted the steps of her temples and palaces until the king's people beat him away with rods. He could work no more for his masters, and he fell into great wretchedness, and the olive tree pined for him and withered away grey and useless as the silver beard of an old dead man.

"Now it came to pass that there was a famine in the land—in these broad plains of Tuscany and Umbria, where the yellow waves of the wheat spread so far and wide: and all the people besought the Bona Dea whose curse was on the black and barren land.

"And the oracle of the temple spake and said, 'Let a sheaf of corn be made of gold and bound up with twelve thousand gossamer threads in gold, finer than the web of the spider, and the lands shall blossom and bear full harvest.'

"Etruria was full of gold workers, and hundreds on hundreds essayed the task, but all failed; for who should work gold so that the spider's spinning should be less fine and less frail?

"Then he who had loved the king's daughter rose

from his wretchedness, and remembered his ancient learning, and said, 'Give me gold, I will try.'

"At first they mocked him; a poor naked out-cast, crawling feebly in the sun. But the famine increased; all the city was full of lamentation by day and night; mothers slew their children not to hear their piercing cries.

"The king came down from his weary throne and said, 'Let the beggar have gold, and try; it can be no worse with us if he fail, since thus we perish.'

"So they gave him gold, and he shut himself alone for six days, and on the seventh he opened the door and came out into the sunshine amongst the multitude of the breathless people, and in his hands were the golden webs of twelve thousand threads, so fine that the spider's gauze beside them seemed coarse.

"The people were silent; the passion of a great joy and fear was on them; by tens of thousands they dragged their fleshless limbs after him, always in silence, to the temple of the Bona Dea.

"There was a great blight everywhere; the black earth sickened under it; the famished people watched with bloodshot ravenous eyes; was the weaving fine enough? Would the goddess accept the offering?

"There was silence in the temple; the strong sun shone on the web of twelve thousand threads.

"Then the oracle spoke, and said, 'By gold shall Etruria live. Let the earth rejoice and bear.'

"And in one moment, on all the earth whereon Etruria held dominion, the green blades broke through the parching soil, and grew and ripened in a second's space in every valley and on every hill.

"Then the multitude cried with one voice, 'Bear

him to the palace, crown him on the king's right hand. Let him have his will in all the land. From the bonds of death he has set us free!

"But he, still on his knees on the threshold of the temple, looked up, and said, 'Nay, I want nothing;—has it made *her* smile?'

"And with that he stretched his hands gently outwards to the sun and died.

"The king's daughter never knew that it was for her the golden web was woven.

"But the gods knew, and said, 'By its gold-workers let Etruria live. For this man's love was great, and its witness shall endure when the nation has perished from the earth and its very records have passed away as the clouds dissolve before daylight.'

"So to this hour, through all the Etrurian land, the vanished people are ever to be traced by the golden links that shine through the dust of the tombs; and the Etrurian gold is without speck or flaw, or equal anywhere, but rises from its burial ever and again where the olives shiver in the summer winds and the maize feathers blow above the buried cities."

It is nothing as I say it now, this tale of his, that fell from his lips that night instead of jest and laughter: but as he spoke it, with the deep blue skies over our heads, with the sweet, cool, acacia-scented air streaming in from the open doors, with the rise and fall of his wonderful voice that could sigh like a sea-shell and sound defiance like a clarion, with that old Etrurian land around lying white beneath the moon, with the mighty Tiber rolling there away beyond the oak-woods, with the dust of the dead king

so near, under the olive-tree on the side of the hill;—with all these—with the shadows on the Florentine robes and the Florentine face of Pascarel, in the tawny half-lights of the dim Arte, the tale had a strange poetry and pathos that moved the passionate people as they heard it to tears.

And when, as it drew to a close, the swift facile words came faster and faster from his lips, falling without strain or visible consciousness into the sonorous rhythm of the Petrarcan sonnets;—when he passed from the past to the present and spoke of the living Italy which had become the inheritrix of Etruscan grace and Latin power, and was the daughter of such mighty dead, that her descended nobility became a divine obligation;—when, with all his soul kindling at the fire of his thoughts into a poet's faith and a prophet's inspiration, he stood, with outstretched arms and flashing eyes, calling on the treasures of the past to become the weapons of the future, and the divided children of the nation to bind themselves into one bond of brotherhood by the chain of a perfect purpose woven fine and indestructible as the gold chain of Etruria by the force of love;—when his impetuous and impassioned improvisation swept like a storm-wind over the listening people, the moonlight from the cloudless skies shining full upon his face,—then a greater force than that of the player fell upon him, and he who held them thus silent in Arezzo, ruled them by the strength of the patriot and the spell of the poet.

The people streamed out quite quiet when his voice had ceased, and went quietly along their various ways through the haunted streets of Petrarca's city.

In many eyes there was the gleam of tears.

They did not dare to cluster round him with shout and song that night, and bear him off as was their wont to some wine feast within the walls. They left him alone, as one who was their master and apart from them.

Only some lads, quite young, whose fathers had died with Carlo Alberto and with Ugo Bassi, drew near him timidly, and gently kissed his garments as in homage.

These were all his thanks in grey Arezzo. But could any greed of pomp or storm of plaudit have been greater?

He himself said never a word, but left us to go indoors to our rest in the street of Orto, and went away outward through the gates into the shining country where the moon was white upon the fields of olive.

CHAPTER XV.

The Sceptre of Feathers.

I REMEMBER that night, that sweet hot August night, I sat sleepless at the open window, watching down the moon-lightened street for the sheer sake of seeing Pascarèl pass through its shadows when he should come homeward.

The hours went slowly by, and he did not come. The old street was silent as a grave; beneath me, before the entrance of an old palace, two Italians stood talking together. They looked gentle people, and their accent was pure and scholarly.

"What genius has that stroller Pascarèl!" said one of

them; "and what a sway over the people, and what a rush of words, and what a choice of powers! In the Trecento he would have been at the head of Tuscany!"

"Oh, altro!" assented the other, heartily. "But in our modern days it is not the men of genius who are eminent; it is the men of talent. All the earth over, it is careful and cautious combination which now succeeds; and it is exactly this of which the nervousness, the impetuosity, the impressionability, the force and the weakness of men of genius, are incapable. This man Pascarel might have led High Italy when she was a group of art-cities, that could be grasped together like a bundle of divining rods or firebrands, and hurled at church or empire by a hand that was fearless enough and able enough not to let them scorch it. But what place is there for a man of his sort of capricious inspiration, and poetic temper, in any part of modern Europe? What Europe crowns now are—drill-sergeants and accountants."

And the Tuscan having said so much, sauntered on with his friend through the high, dark archway where the acanthus was clinging about the old sculptured bosses of some race whose very name had perished in Arezzo.

As they disappeared, there came into the street the figure of Pascarel; his white dress caught the gleam of the moonbeams, and he passed thoughtfully down the grey stones, through the cool brown shadows.

The church clocks of Arezzo were tolling four o'clock; in the east there was the first tremulous lighting of the skies that heralds daybreak.

He came slowly down the street, very slowly, under the leaning antique walls that had heard the first frail wail of Petrarch's opening life.

Looking up, he saw me where I leaned above. There was a trecento stone gallery to my casement, and in it was growing, set in a great red conca, a gum-cistus, all white with flower.

I looked down to him through the leaves.

"Ah, donzella! up so very early?" he said to me. "That is not wise when we are not upon the road. What! not been to bed? Oh, that is very wilful."

"You have not been to bed yourself," I said to him. "What did you find in those fields? I thought you would never come back."

"You have been watching for that? I shall be very angry if you ruin your health in such nonsense."

He did not look very angered. There was a smile on his mouth, and the beautiful sudden light in his eyes that I loved so well.

"But what did you find in the fields?" I cried to him. "Have you been to the king's tomb again?"

He paused a moment, then glanced down the street to see that it was empty.

"Well, no, donzella," he said, hesitatingly, with a little flush on his face. "I may as well tell you—it will give you pleasure. You were sad to-day for that poor contadino, with his old sick people and his seven children, who had had nothing to eat all the summer, the worm being at his wheat, and his padrone a hard man? Well, I went to take him half the Arte's receipts. It was so full I could easily spare him that

without begrudging ourselves another fat peahen. And I went to-night—well, because walking at night is pleasanter than by day in this time of the year, and I thought I should meet the poor heart-stricken wretch just going out across his fruitless fields—as I did. Besides, the old woman, without food, would not have lived long past noon. It is no use talking to people about a chain of gold for Italy, unless one does one little miserable mite towards forging a lilliputian link of it.”

“Oh, I am so glad, so glad!” I cried, in my thoughtless delight in him, leaning down through the cistus flowers of silver. “It is so good of you, so like you. What did the contadino say? Was he not happy?”

“Ah, we will not talk about what he said,” murmured Pascarel, lightly. “When you have seven children and an old father and mother all wailing for bread, and a hard padrone who will screw you down to the letter of the Mezzadria, and, if the soil be empty, lets your mouth be empty too,—of which hardness there is very little in this Tuscany of ours, God be praised,—when you are in this sort of plight, of course any little gift brings gladness to you, and you are apt to talk a very great deal too much about gratitude, as this poor fellow did, until I was fain to run away from him, and leave him weeping over his two lean bullocks, who look the worse for no provender themselves, poor beasts! But get to bed, bambina mia; these old streets are not too healthy in the moonlight. Good night, and dream of Petrarca.”

But I dreamed, instead, of Pascarel.

He might have ruled Tuscany in the old days of Gian della Bella, or the Uberti—so they said. Well, like enough. But was it not better as it was?

I thought nothing could be freer or gladder than this life he led.

It was like the old sceptre of peacock's plumes that Mariuccia had set on high, with the blessed palm-sheaf; in emblem of so many simple joys, of laughter in a garret, of a bowl of field-born violets, of jests over a pan of chestnuts, of a dusty brocade brought down from high estate to embellish a child's masking.

The world would have contemned, like my father, the sceptre of feathers.

But could the world have given aught better in exchange?

I thought not,—sinking to sleep, while the day-break stole over the dusky stillness of Arezzo.

And I was sure that the poor contadino, hurrying homeward at sunrise to his capanna, in the midst of his barren fields, bearing food and oil to his famished children, and wine to his old dying people, would have thought not likewise could one have asked him.

The gold was rare and costly that had been found in the tomb of the king that day; but it seemed to me that all the gold in Etruria could not have outweighed that impulse which had sent the feet of Pascarel on their errand through the moonlit olives.

We wandered awhile about old Umbria. The mighty oak woods were welcome in the hot suns of

August, and there was no sweeter place for a Midsummer dream than where the birds were singing in the flower-sown shadows about S. Francis's quiet Carceri.

We loitered in Gubbio, thinking of Maestro Georgio and of his wondrous rainbow hues; and we sat on the stony slopes where Pliny's villa once stood by the thread of hill-fed water; and we watched the sunset colour burn on the Spoleto mountains, with great rainclouds waiting the fall of night to break above the marshes; and we sauntered in the clear elastic dawns, over the sites of the buried cities, where the goat cropped herbage above the sunken altars, and the smoke of the charcoal-burners curled up amongst the oak boughs where the incense had once risen to Jupiter Feretrius, or Venus Pandemos.

And thence we strayed into Tuscany for the vintage month, and laughed to our heart's content amongst the vines, and saw the wines pressed in the old, wasteful, classic fashion, and the children tumble half-drunk amongst the reddening leaves, and the dogs gorge themselves on grapes unstinted, and the great wains roll homeward laden with purple wealth through the narrow paths where the crocuses were all alive again in millions, till the earth was like one great amethyst with them, and across the vast, still, sleeping valleys, where the sun was still hot, and the white homesteads were all hung with the golden ropes of that year's millet.

We worked and laughed and feasted on grapes with the rest all the shining days through, and at evening the Arte was thronged with the lusty Contadini, their mirth the readier for a plenteous vintage,

and their strong brown limbs grape-stained like the limbs of Bacchus.

The recoltà, which was of abundance, except in some few places, as about Arezzo, where the fly and worm had ravaged, made Tuscany all glad and gay, gladdest and gayest of all the Val di Grève, and the Mugellino, and the Val di Chiana, and the other Pianurè lying close about Florence.

We paused in all the little towns one by one, and October passed away, golden and sultry, and ruddy with jest and song about the great wine vats; and the gardens full of the strong sweet smell of damask autumn roses and the waxen tuberosa, and the grass filled at every step with the vari-coloured cups of the wild anemones.

On the first day of the new month, which is dedicated to all the saints—in imitation of the old great Latin feast of all the gods in the times of “gli dei falsi e bugiardi,” we came down from the heights where we had been amongst the forest farms of the Casentino and of Vallambrosa.

For the weather had grown chill there on the mountains, and we had come slowly downward with intent to go into Florence and rest there through the winter frosts, until the time of Carnival should have come round again, and have again passed away, killed with the cannonade of the Confettè.

Before he should enter the town, however, Pascarèl had taken a fancy to set the Arte a little while under Fiesole, so that the scattered people in the little paesi along the hill sides should have their hour's mirth under the Red Lily without being driven to take a long tramp for it down the stony slopes. And the

place he chose for the Arte, and got permission to use from the owner, whom he knew, was a narrow piece of grassland amongst the stripped vineyards, with the grey bleak slopes rising above, and making sunrise late and sunset very early to the few who dwelt in that ravine of the mountain-shed Mugnone.

The Feast of the Saints rose a cloudless and radiant day, in which the scent and the warmth of the summer were sure to prevail, so soon as the first chill crispness of the early morning on the heights should have disappeared before the sunrays.

I remember how we came over the mountain side in the clear cold of the early day.

How we heard the matins bells ringing in the dusky depth where Florence was lying.

How we watched the white mists lighting little by little as the sun came over the edges of the hills.

How the libeccio was blowing keenly as we crossed the square of Fiesole, but fell into a mere soft breeze as we went down the winding road between the grey stone walls and the wild green hedges, with ever and again some scarlet glimpse of roses burning above a villa gate.

It was only cold enough to make the air free and elastic and inspiring as a sea air.

All the hillside was in a pomp of scarlet and purple, and gold and bronze, with great masses of deep green where the ilex and acanthus grew, and soft pale greys where the olives were. Everywhere there were clouds of autumn flowers. At times, as we passed some wine-presses under the trees, the people shouted us a gay good-day. At times a kid, browsing

amongst the stripped vines, bleated a tender little note upon the silence.

I remember how we went down the shelving zig-zag ways, the mules having passed before us at day-break with the Arte in charge of a peasant lad. Pascarèl and I were foremost; he had his mandoline slung about him, and struck it now and then so that a sound, sweet and fine as the call of a thrush, came from it, and seemed to drift away down amongst the wreaths of the mist.

At some little distance Brunóttà followed, talking eagerly with Cocomero of a quarrel she had had with a contadina about some duck's eggs in the place where we had slept. Little Toccò ran hither and thither at his fancy, now chasing a lizard, now plucking a rose that nodded over a wall, now stopping to chatter with the women plaiting the straw.

I remember how we went down the hill light-hearted in the morning air, pausing reverently as a priest passed by with the Santissimo for some sick creature, a white-froked chorister going before him ringing the little bell along the peaceful ways.

I remember how we strolled on silenced for a moment or two, and then talked of the winter in Florence, and fell softly, as people will who have learned to love one another, into recollection of the first day we had met in the City of Lilies; and so, with the west wind in our faces, came down above the bridge of the Badià, where the old brown monastery stood, russet with age, amongst the olive and the mist.

I remember how we broke our fast whilst the sun was still low in the east, at a little dwelling-house a mile above the village, where Pizzichiria was scrawled

in chalk along the wall, and the green bough above the doorway told that the tenant of the house sold wine as well.

I remember how we sat out under the pergola where some grapes still hung, and brake our bread and drank sweet foaming draughts of milk, the cow meanwhile, in her shed hard by, gazing at us with her eyes of Hère over a great green dew-wet mound of trefoil; and below, amongst the olives, the sacred Solitudine, rising gaunt and bare, and brown and sombre with innumerable memories.

I remember how we sat there, and laughed and clattered gaily, and then took up the mandoline afresh and sang all sorts of follies and of fancies, and then rose and strolled away down the hills to see where they would set up the Arte, and soon found a broad field a few roods above the Badià itself, where the fattore, knowing us, had given eager acquiescence for the throne of our hedgerow Thespia to be erected.

Ah, yes; I remember it all so well—so well—that last day of that glad, poetic, fanciful, careless life which was fated to be broken off suddenly and for ever, as the pomegranate flower is snapped from its stalk by the mistral.

BOOK V.

THE FEAST OF THE DEAD.

CHAPTER I.

The Fountain of the Pine.

It had been all summer—endless, cloudless summer—from the time of the carnival violets to the time of the autumn cyclamen. And there was no foreboding of storm or of winter in the air that day of All Saints, though, whilst I knew it not, I heard for the last time the soft low laughter of Pascarèl—of my lover;—my lover surely, though he spoke never directly of love but only uttered it in those million ways and words and charms of touch and eloquence of glance which are love's truest, subtlest, and most perilous language.

He and I stayed in the field behind the Solitudine and threw ourselves down there beside a little thread-like brook whose water was all red and purple with anemones. Little Toccò wandered away as his habit was under the stripped vines; Cocomero had stayed with Brunóttà to help her, as they said, beat some linen in the shallow course of the Mugnone.

It was yet quite early in the morning, and the gentle coolness of daybreak had not left the air.

It is quite wild up there; the hills rise steep and sombre, their sides dark with the cypress; the stream runs through a deep gorge, and a bridge with a pointed

arch rises over it quaint and grey; at this time, before the floods of winter had come down, it was still shallow, and a man was wading it with a fishing-net upon his back.

Southward, above us, rose the old Etrurian slopes, and the walls and towers of the city that perished for daring to aspire to be rival of the Scarlet Lily.

Westward towered the great Salviati pile amongst its vines and olives: and lower down was the smaller, humbler villa set in a sea of roses, and girt with willow and lemon and magnolia, whither the great nobles were wont to come down in the hush of the fruit-scented nights to their love trysts; directly at our feet was the gloom of the Solitudine; away there in the far centre, betwixt the lines of hills, Florence was stretched as a white swan may spread her wings to sleep upon her river nest. Yet not so far but what we heard each note of her warning chimes; for it was the feast-day of the saints, as I have said, and the bells of her countless churches were calling to one another.

All about us were the vine lands and the olive woods, the rich rank vegetation sown thick with wild anemones. And so we resolved that there the theatre should stand, and then we threw ourselves down amidst the thick grass and the trefoil with the delicate heads of the cyclamens about us in tens of thousands.

"No theatre was ever better placed," said Pascarel, lying at my feet amongst the olives. "Not even where ankle deep in thyme the Latins laughed over the roaring fun of Plautus. It is a little profane, I fear, to set a playhouse so near the Badià?

"When one thinks how often those great sad eyes

of Dante's have gazed through this same mist of olive leaves away to the dome of the Duomo yonder. It is very profane, I am afraid.

"When one thinks of all those monks, too, of San Marco-in-Urbe, who used to come up here to their mountain Badià to rest their eyes and souls a little out of hearing of the city riot:—Savonarola who, in all his life of storm and prayer, and triumph and torment, had time to cherish a damask rose-tree:—and that bravest of brave souls, Domenico, whom one loves, I think, almost better than any other saint or hero of them all:—Fra Bartolommèo must have worked here too; though there is not his mark upon the walls:—and the divine Angelico sometimes left the dim old convent down in Florence to come hither and paint for the Solitudjine.

"They must have been amongst his most blessed days—alone here with his pure thoughts and visions; and the precious colours waiting on his hand; and about him the solitude of the cloisters, and the country silence of the hill sides. How wise he was,—how very wise,—to put away from him the proffered mitre and the possible tiara!

"Yes; this is every inch of it haunted ground, sacred ground, though the bullocks tread it with the ploughshare and the reapers strip the vines.

"Do you ever think of those artist-monks who have strewed Italy with altar-pieces and missal miniatures till there is not any little lonely dusky town of hers that is not rich by art? Do you often think of them? I do.

"There must have been a beauty in their lives—a great beauty—though they missed of much, of more

than they ever knew or dreamed of, let us hope. In visions of the Madonna they grew blind to the meaning of a woman's smile, and illuminating the golden olive wreath above the heads of saints they lost the laughter of the children under the homely olive trees without.

"But they did a noble work in their day; and leisure for meditation is no mean treasure, though the modern world does not number it amongst its joys.

"One can understand how men born with nervous frames and spiritual fancies into the world when it was one vast battle-ground, where its thrones were won by steel and poison, and its religion enforced by torch and faggot, grew so weary of the never-ending turmoil, and of the riotous life which was always either a pageant or a slaughter-house, that it seemed beautiful to them to withdraw themselves into some peaceful place like this Badià and spend their years in study and in recommendation of their souls to God, with the green and fruitful fields before their cloister windows, and no intruders on the summer stillness as they painted their dreams of a worthier and fairer world except the blue butterflies that strayed in on a sunbeam, or the gold porsellini that hummed at the lilies in the Virgin's chalice."

His voice dropped in its dreamy melody down the tranquil air joining the hum of the insects, the chimes of the distant bells, and the splash in the shallow Mugnone as the fisher waded over its stones. Stones which were now so dry that a rabbit could have hopped from one to another of them without wetting its white feet; although in winter time the little moun-

tain stream so often rages in tempest and wrecks the homesteads, and deluges stalls and byres.

He shifted his attitude a little, and his hand played amongst the anemones; the lights and the shadows changed on his face as the boughs above were blown to and fro by the fresh sea wind.

"I am not sure," he went on, "that if I had been born then I should not have been a monkish painter myself; though I fear I should have worn a cuirass like fighting Fra Benedetto, and scaled the walls like libertine Fra Lippi. The Angel Monk would have found no fraternity, I fear, with me.

"Will he be angered, think you, that we set the Arte so near to his altar-piece?—and Savonarola, who said to all gaities Retro Satanas?—or Dante, who had small patience with any puppets or pleasure-seekers? He was so much here, or so they say, when he would withdraw from Guelph and Ghibelline, and be at peace a little while. One can believe he wrote better here, in the quiet of the hills and with sad Fiesole so near, than down in the street by San Martino where it was all so cramped and dark.

"Yes;—I am troubled about that;—it is irreverent to set the little lily flag of the Arte flying here. And the villagers of Marco Vecchio are lusty of lung, and will laugh loud and trouble the stillness of the old Solitudine. Yet it must have heard worse in its time: many a shriek as the Salviati steel went through a peasant's breast for daring to breathe against seigneurial rights; many a crash and clamour of crossed arms down there in the defile as the lances of Hawkwood swept from the mountains; many a groan stifled there in the waters as the Imperial reiters clattered with

devil's joy through the curse and the smoke of the burning hill sides. Do you not see it all?

"And Dante, with his crimson lucco trailing, coming up wearily there through Marco Vecchio, and glancing at the dead horses on the bridge, and the empty casques, and the broken lance heads amongst the grass under the vines, and then going on his way into the quiet of the Badià, sick at heart?

"Yes: certainly Dante must have seen and heard worse things than Toto's little cap and plume and the villagers' harmless laughter before our stage to-night. And though I have spoken evil and light things to you, donzella, of players, yet I am not sure that we have not done more good if we could sum it up than half the preachers and the poets. With the poets indeed we have gone hand in hand from all time; and without us Shakespeare and Racine, Calderon, and Goldoni, would have been dumb to their nations; and as for the preachers, Savonarola was a good man and true, and Francesco d'Assissi was blessed of all peoples, and the name of San Bruno is great for all time; but on the whole I doubt if any of them did more to blow a health-giving breeze through the world's lazar houses than have done in another fashion our much slandered Pantomimè."

Pascarèl was silent awhile; when he spoke it was with some impatience.

"The great Austrian diamond, the Lemon Stone, was picked up for two soldi in our Mercato Vecchio off a pedlar's stall. If I chanced on such luck as that, donzella!"

He stopped abruptly; his thoughts seemed to me

irrelevant and oddly strung together—Dante and the ducal diamond?

"If you did?" I echoed. "Well?—what if you did? Tell me?"

He laughed a little.

"Nay, the face of the world would be changed for me. That is all."

"Changed! And can you want that? Are you not happy?"

"Six months—and all my life before—I was. Yes."

My eyes filled with a sudden rush of tears that blotted out the sight of Florence. For the first time I thought him cruel.

"That means—before you found me! If I torment you, let me go? And yet sometimes you seem so glad to have me!—"

I was but a child, and I spoke as a child: but the fire that swept over me from the momentarily uplifted eyes of Pascarel, scorched the word to silence on my trembling mouth.

He caught my hands and kissed them with eager and tremulous tenderness, as his habit often was with me.

"Do not jest about that. You are the life of my life," he murmured, holding my hands against his lips the while. Then he was silent too.

"But," I whispered to him, wistfully, perplexed strangely, and vaguely touched to apprehension—"but, if I gave you pleasure indeed, why should you be so much less gay than when you knew me first? Then, all things contented you; you laughed, and were never troubled. And now you seem to be for-

ever wistful for some fate you have not; you, who were used to say that you would hardly change with Boiardo or Bernardo!"

His face was turned from me as he listened, and he moved a little restlessly.

"Cara mia," he said, endeavouring, I thought, to speak more jestingly, with but little success, for he was too frank of nature to counterfeit well the gaiety that in happy moments was so natural to him—"oh, cara mia, you have read—or I have recited to you—the Orlando Innamorato many and many a time. Do you not remember how, when Rinaldo found himself in Arden, the single garden-lily struck him to earth—all Paladin though he was—and the blows of the white and red roses left him more dead than alive, and made the sharp edge of his good sword Fusberta of no more strength or worth than a straw? Every man comes, soon or late, to that unequal flower-combat in the enchanted forest; and the armour that has been proof against the dragons, and the shield that has been undinted by the giants, are of no avail to help him, once by the Fountain of the Pine."

My cheeks grew warm and my heart throbbed quickly in wild tumult as I heard; I said nothing; I felt a sweet dreamy happiness steal over me.

For was not the garden-lily that struck down Rinaldo the weapon of the youth who was called Love?

And was not the Fountain of the Pine the one from which Rinaldo, drinking after the wounds of the lily, grew blind to both the worlds of truth and magic, and saw only "la dolce vista del viso sereno" of the Sister of the Lion, of the Rose of Pentecost?

If he said so much, why not yet a little more? the dim wonder of it drifted vaguely over me, but it was only vaguely, for I was happy in the knowledge that I was dear to him, and I was too young to question of what sort or of what strength this half silent and half eloquent love might be.

"Let us talk of what we would do if we found another Lemon Stone in the market," he said gaily, with a certain impatience in his voice. "Ah, you are ashamed of me for hankering after riches at the last like this? Well, I am ashamed of myself, but if I found it I doubt if I should keep it. Whatever I own in the evening is always gone before the next day's sunset. But only think how odd it must be, to go through the market poor as Job; hungry perhaps, and with the hot pavement scorching your feet through the holes in your boots; and then to see a queer-shaped bit of glass, and give a copper-piece for it, because you are sorry for that poor old wretch, whose only stock in trade is that stall of miserable *Roba*, and then to go home to your garret with it, and be struck by some strange look in it as the sun's rays catch it so, that you take it over the way to your friend at the little pharmacy, who is a man of science in his small way, under his bunches of herbs and his glass retorts: and then all at once to know that by that shining thing no bigger than a walnut, you are become all in a minute the master of a kingdom—only think of it all; I could almost talk myself mad with the very fancy of it. But in those stories of diamonds they never tell us what becomes of that first buyer of it, who has all the real sorcery and music of its history. One would like to know if he ever went

back to the market-stall and shared his gains. One would *hope* he always did; but human nature being what it is, that is doubtful, very doubtful, I am afraid."

I listened to him in some wonder; Pascarel, the man of all the world to whom riches were most indifferent and who had resisted all manner of temptations and refused to turn his genius into gold—to dream thus of the treasures locked in a cube of carbon! I struck him on the lips with a scourge of seeding grasses, and scolded him for his new-born avarice.

"Dear donzella," he made answer in his caressing voice, and with more warmth on the darkness of his face than the sun brought there, "you must have read a thousand and one eastern tales in your time. Did never you read of the shepherd who was quite happy guarding his flocks in the wide Persian plains, and roaming at will with no thought but where to find a fresh watercourse when his beasts were athirst, or a cool grove of palm and date wherein to lay him down when the stars arose—quite happy all his years, until one day the king's daughter rode by and her shadow fell betwixt him and the sun? And he was never again content; never, never again. Have you not read of him?"

"But I am not a king's daughter!" I cried, and then was silent; there on the hillside that was sown with cyclamen, close above the Badià.

He laughed a little; a low, soft, sad laugh that had more tenderness in it than tears have:—doubtless at the unconscious ingenuousness with which I took to myself the Persian tale.

He drew me down close to him where he leaned at my feet amongst the grass.

"You come of great people, I suppose; people who would scarcely care to see you on a strolling player's booth. And you have a higher kingdom than any; the kingdom of innocence;—wherein I have no right to trespass."

He was silent a long while, whilst the chimes rung slowly from above, where Fiesole was calling her scattered flock to the fold:

"You have heard of Alaran," he said, abruptly. "Alaran, of Acqui, who bore off the daughter of Emperor Otho, and having nothing in the world but two horses, kept one to convey her away with, and sold the other to buy a hut in the forest, where he turned charcoal-burner. Legend says that the imperial Alaxia was happy as the birds in the woods in this humble estate, and that one day great Otho going hunting in all his pomp, after he was summoned to the Roman crown, called for a cup of water to a peasant-girl, and looking down on the face of the woman who brought it, saw the face of Alaxia gladder, and not a whit less proud than it had been in his own palace. What do you say to the story? do you wonder that the princess was content with the hut in the oak glades?"

His eyes sought mine with eager wistfulness. I laughed a little happily, and thought I knew why she had been so glad there in the charcoal-burner's cabin.

"No; I do not wonder," I said, softly, more to myself than him. "Once I should have wondered, but now—I understand."

He did not ask me why, but his hand closed fast and warm on mine.

"Ah! my donzella," he said softly and very sadly, after a little time. "So you think—so you think, being a child. But you might repent. See here,—I am content with my life—it is good enough in its way, though nameless and fruitless also perhaps. But I cannot disguise from myself that it is not a fit life for you.

"You are truly a 'donzella'; you have the hands, and the feet, and the voice and the ways, and all the pretty imperious graces that belong to those gentle born.

"You were reared hardly? Yes, I know.

"But you have the instincts of a baby princess for all that.

"Could you be content always to go a-foot in all weathers, to sleep in little humble places, to eat homely fare as we do, to live with the people—the Italian people, it is true, but still the people only?

"And that is why I wish for the Lemon Stone.

"Do you understand now?"

I half laughed and half cried as I heard him, with the glad golden morning all around, and my hand folded close in his.

It was only a sceptre of peacock's plumes that we had.

I knew that; but it seemed to me better than the winged sceptre of gold and ivory that symbolled the empire of the world.

I tossed a shower of anemone cups above our heads as I cried to him,—

"I do not understand! I do not want to under-

stand! I shall be content anyhow, anywhere, any time—always—with you!”

He let go my hands—for him almost roughly—and rose quickly to his feet, and paced to and fro quickly under the trees silently, with the broad flap of his hat drawn down over his eyes. He brushed and trampled the anemones ruthlessly as he went; I could not tell what moved him, whether anger or pain.

I loved him well—indeed,—loved him with all the ardour and simplicity of a child who had never before had any great affection for any living thing; but I missed that subtle sympathy, that perfect passion and patience which alone enable one heart to feel each pang or each joy that makes another beat.

His moods were as changeful as the winds, and at times there was a restless impatience and depression on him which was far beyond my understanding.

I did not comprehend now what I had said amiss; the idea had occurred to me that he was growing tired of me, and it made me sad; in the early days he had never been capricious thus. I did not go to him therefore, but sat still amongst the grasses and the fruitless boughs of the vines.

Ah, Dio mio! if I had gone to him and asked him why he was so grave, he might have spoken—who knows?—and the face of the world would have been changed for us. For what would I not have pardoned had he asked me?

After a little while, he mastered whatever emotion had moved him, and came to me again. He spoke in his old gentle, caressing way, a little colder, perhaps, if anything, and less gay.

“Dear donzella, you are very good to care to

wander with me," he said softly. "But I fear it is but a sorry mode of existence for you; and I fear your horoscope contained something better for your future than a strolling player's homeless career. The clear planet that presided over your birth cannot have been the tinsel star on the painted foreheads of the Pantomimi. But, *altro!* we have had enough, and too much, of such serious chatter. Some day we must talk seriously indeed, and I must—but never mind now. It is All Saints Day, and, perhaps the last day of summer. There was frost at sunrise. Let us be happy while we can, *carina*. Such a morning as this," he said, after a pause, laughing himself back into that gaiety of soul which lived side by side in his nature with a certain passionate and poetic sadness: "and all this red gold of autumn ours, and a whole long sunny day in which to wander as we like, it is infamous to be melancholy, or to be athirst for lemon stones, or for anything more than the good that we have got. Lean backward to be in the shade of that tree; and let your hand lie quiet in mine—so; and now I will tell you a story."

I loved his stories; I had the insatiable delight in them of a young mind to which romances were unknown; and his skill in telling them was marvellous.

The heroical absurdities of the *Morgante Maggiore*, and the *Furioso*, the grotesque fairyland, and miraculous adventures of *Basile*; the feuds and love-tales of the populace, as *Cortese* sang them fresh from the market-place of *Masaniello*; the narratives of *Boccaccio*; the jests of *Berni*; the comedies of *Goldoni*—all these and their like were stripped of all coarseness and harmfulness which they might possess, and served to me de-

corated by all the grace and playfulness of his own fancy added to them.

I was readily consoled: when he was gay and good to me, no shadows had power to rest on me.

No lemon stone could have added anything to my perfect peace and gladness as I lay there under the golden-fruited pear-tree amongst the cyclamens, with my hand in his, listening to the sweet, sonorous cadence of his voice, while the Lily of Florence floated on the flag of the wooden theatre, and the robins chirped amongst the many-coloured autumn blossoms, and the sun was high, and the radiance was cloudless above the Solitudine.

I was a child; I needed nothing more than the joy of the moment; and whatever darkness he might see in the future it was all light to me; for did it not lie in the sweet sunshine of his smile?

It was All Saints Day; we could hear the bells ringing in the city all the morning long; we leaned there on the hillside, and took no thought for the morrow—the morrow that was the Feast of the Dead.

CHAPTER II.

The Night of All Saints.

THAT evening he did not play at his Arte, and we strolled down the hillside into Florence as the sun set.

Brunotta elected to stay behind; she had some shirts to iron, as she said, and wished to sup afterwards with a blacksmith's wife in Marco Vecchio. Coco was missing when we left the hills, and little Toccò alone ran beside us, throwing his ruzzolà as

gleefully as though he had been six years instead of sixteen.

It was a beautiful warm red and gold evening, promising to be stormy on the morrow, but splendid then, as the sun set, and full of odour from the full wine-presses where they stood beneath the trees, and the glow of roses that burned over every villa wall.

We went into the city on the carretta of a contadino piled with fresh hay; for we cut hay all the year round in Italy.

The old mule stumbled down the stony ways; I sat amidst the flower-sown grasses, and drew the dead daisies in it through my fingers; Pascarel walked beside me; the boy ran on before; the contadino told us stories of his crops and vines, and of the prices he had made by his wife's home-woven linen; sometimes we had to draw up against the wall and wait to let a waggon-load of grapes go by; all along the road the people were sitting out at their doors.

It had been a good vintage time, and all the world was content; at the gates even the soldiers who took the custom dues were in good humour, laughing over flasks of new red wine.

The city was all life and light. It was a beloved feast of the people, and the streets were full.

All the bells were pealing; there was music everywhere. Women leaned from the casements with roses in their hands. Over all the place there was a curious dreamy golden hue, deepened here and there into deep bronze shadows, at times broken by a flush of scarlet, as a wood fire glowed through an open doorway, at times paled into a pearly coolness when the

last daylight gleamed upon the marble of a statue or a tomb.

The Florentines were all out, flocking to the churches, to the theatres, to the bands of music, to the coffee houses, playing dominoes in the street, chaunting praises at the vespers, wandering by the river side, or gambling at morra at the corners of the streets.

We ate black figs and drank black coffee hard by the old palace of the Strozzi, with the cornice of Cronaca still catching the sunrays, whilst the walls below were black as night, and the passers-by were illumined by lantern and lamplight shed from doorway and casement, and little bright specks of flame like glowworms sparkled as the stands of the chestnut-sellers wandered from place to place, and the vendors of amaretti and brigidini shouted from corner to corner.

Then having long before lost little Toccò, where some street-tombola for toys and fruits had attracted him, we too wandered away, and strayed with others up the stairs of the little Loggè theatre, above the old mediæval granary, and laughed our hearts out over the merry melodies of Don Bucefalo, and then came out again into the streets into the starlight.

"To-morrow will be the Feast of the Dead," said Pascarèl, his voice dropping softly, as we went through the Street of the Dead. "There will be only the sound of the Miserere all over Florence to-morrow.

"Well, no city has so true a cause to pray for her dead, for none other has dead so great.

"Will any pray for Ginevra, I wonder? I think

you will, gioja mia. Do you not see her, on just such a night as this, flying down this very place?

"There is no story so perfect as the Ginevra tale.

"The dreadful loneliness of the great dome as she awoke beneath it; the vast haunted stillness, with here and there the whiteness of a moonbeam; these quiet gloomy streets at midnight; the black shadows; these yawning archways, like the gates of tombs; the trembling, hunted, heart-sick thing, with her bare feet wounded on the stones, and the grave-clothes falling from her shivering limbs; everywhere denial, incredulity, horror, superstition; everywhere the closed wicket and the cry of terror as at some unearthly apparition.

"Then at last the lover's threshold, the timid summons of despair, the open door, the instant welcome; not a doubt, not a question, not a fear—What matter whether living or dead, of heaven or of hell?

"What matter whence she came?

"What matter what she brought?

"Welcome, thrice welcome, as flowers in the May-time.

"Welcome and precious—since the face was *hers!*"

His voice had a thrill of passion in it that seemed upon my ear, in the silence of the deserted street, sweet as the song of the nightingales in the ilex forests in the nights of Midsummer. I felt—without well knowing what I felt—that it was not of Ginevra only he was thinking.

"And it was all true too, here in this Via della Morte," he said, very softly and sadly, after awhile, drawing me closer against him as we went under the solemn shadow of the leaning walls; and he uncovered

his head reverently in the moonlight, as though there had passed by him all those dead, for whom his Florence on the morrow would beseech her God.

We went on in silence until we had passed through the Gate of San Gallo to go homewards towards the hills.

"That cost us in all just four soldi," laughed Pascarel, as the city barriers closed behind us. "Figs and coffee and music, and all for the price a rich man gives for one cigar, or one peach, away in Paris. What do we want with a Lemon Stone? Our coffee would be in eggshell china, to be sure, and we should have red velvet arm chairs at the Pergola; but should we be any the happier really? tell me, donzella, should we?"

"How could we be any happier?" I answered him dreamily.

It had only cost four soldi, that sweet starlight evening, amongst the laughter of the people and the ringing cadence of the Bucefalo; but what of that?

The gladness was with us that never comes twice in a lifetime, and our hearts had an echo for the music that made it sweet as the voices of angels.

He did not answer.

As I glanced at his face, there was a certain vague disquietude upon it that stole there all suddenly, while his eyes beamed on mine in the shadows, with the look that had made silence fall between us that day beside the Rio Gonfio.

"Ah, carina, you do not know, you do not know," he murmured softly.

What was it that I did not know? That look in

his eyes made my heart beat in a strange tumult, and I did not ask him.

We went in silence up the hilly road, with the stars shining overhead. He passed his arm around me to aid me in the toilsome way, and drew my hand in his.

No palace floor strewn with roses was ever softer to the sandalled feet of an eastern queen than seemed that stony dreary way to me.

The road was quite deserted at that hour. The moonrays made it white and calm.

The dust of it was changed to silver, and its jagged walls seemed like ivory where the light touched them, and like malachite and porphyry where the green ivy and the golden vine leaves crossed each other.

From the wine-presses full of juice of the grapes there came strong fruitlike odours.

In the stillness we could hear the goats browsing off the grass under the stripped vines. There were sweet scents of roses, of pasture, of grazing cattle, as we passed the villa gates. Away in the city below there was a sound of men singing to the chords of a lute. Above, against the lustre of the skies, rose the white outlines of sad Fiesole.

We paused a moment to rest within the garden walls of a villino. Cypressess were swaying plume-like in the wind; wild roses were blowing, half-closed, with the dews shut in their hearts; a stream of water dropped slowly into a marble shell; clusters of yellow grapes hung about a broken statue of dead Hyacinthus.

We stood there close together, with the stars above us, and on the cool night air the scent of the crushed grapes and fallen leaves.

In the soft gloom, his eyes burned into mine; his arms drew me closer; his lips touched my hands, my cheeks, my throat.

Are there any who have not known these hours?— they have heard but half the language, have seen but half the sun.

We spoke but little. What need were there for words.

We went slowly, after awhile, homeward up the road, which at another time would have seemed steep and dreary enough, but to me was beautiful as the earth can only be once in the length of any life.

There were no lights in Marco Vecchio, nor in the little humble place where we had made our dwelling. There was only the moonlight glistening on the convent walls above upon the heights, and a falling star that ran swift and bright until it dropped in the sea of the olive woods.

I went up to my little bare chamber, where the brick floor was white from the rays of the moon.

He stayed without, walking to and fro beneath the bronzed leaves of the walnuts.

I was sleepless and full of those dreams born of memory, which are sweeter than all the dreams of fancy.

The small square casement of my chamber was hung round with thick acanthus coils; beyond them the stars of Orion gleamed in the deep blue of the skies.

All the hillside sloped away dimly towards Florence, pale under the moon, and only black where the cypress grew. The worn marbles and dulled frescoes of the old historic villas gleamed like silver, and

below in the valley the lights of the city glowed as a cluster of lùcciole glows in the harvest amidst the blowing maize.

The roof of the house was low; the upper chambers were underneath the eaves, some broken blocks of macigno, grown over by a fig-tree, were beneath my window. He, looking upward, saw me leaning there.

He paused a moment; then, lithe as a deer, swung himself by the boughs of the fig until he could touch me where he stood.

The great dark leaves were all round him; the moonlight was upon his face. He drew my hands about his neck, and murmured the sweetest words of passion that lie in the tongue of Tasso, of Romeo, of Francesca.

The perfect night was all around us. We were alone beneath the throbbing stars, amidst the burning roses.

There, in the old Badià, men, dreaming of heaven, had missed the heaven that we entered by a touch, a look, a breath.

CHAPTER III.

Sunrise.

I LAY awake for very happiness that night, and rose so soon as the sun came over the hills and through the broad screen of the fig foliage.

It was a beautiful wet, cool dewy world into which I ran joyous and bare-headed from out the little lowly capanna on to the misty side of the hills.

I was a child in my joy; I was full of the present;

I had no thought beyond; I reasoned on nothing; I reflected on nothing; I only wanted to hear him say once more he loved me.

Life was not more real to me than if we had been genit, like the Gwyn Araun he envied; it was a wonderful perfect flowerlike thing that I held in eagerness and ecstasy, doubting not that it came from God.

I ran into the sweet, cold, rosy, misty morning, with the bronze of the reddened vine leaves about my feet, and looked up at the blue sky and laughed a little gladly and low, and then felt my eyes fill with delicious tears, and stood still, wondering if ever any creature had been so blessed as I.

About me was all the gold and crimson of the autumn foliage; the whole hill-side seemed to burn with it up to the brown walls of the old Badià; but away in the valley there was a dense white fog in which Florence was hidden from sight; even the golden cross of her cathedral was no longer visible.

I dropped on to a stone bench in the olive orchard of the cottage, and sat and dreamed, and listened for the footfall of Pascarèl. But all was quite silent round me.

My heart fell a little. I had thought that he would have been watching as eagerly for the dawn as I was.

After a while bells began to ring in the city under the pale shadows of the fog. I could hear them where I sat on the hill-side; but they sounded muffled and sad.

A woman came through the olives to cross the bridge of San Marco. She passed me closely; she was weeping quietly.

I looked at her in a sort of wonder; in this world

—my beautiful, wonderful fairy world—how was any sorrow possible?

"I go to pray for my lost children," she said, gently, in answer to the look upon my face. "It is the Feast of the Dead. May you never know grief, my pretty signorina."

She went on under the olives. I shivered a little where I sat, with the red vine coils bright about my feet: the mists dense as clouds in the valley.

Florence was veiled in her white shroud; she was mourning her dead.

I had forgotten what the day was.

I gave a swift thought to the lonely nameless graves in cold Verona.

What had happened? Nothing.

And yet in the stead of my perfect joy there stole on me a vague fear.

CHAPTER IV.

Sunset.

ALL was quite still on the hill-side.

A few peasants went through the trees to matins in the old monastery church.

The bells rang on wearily and mournfully, echoing through the fog.

Little Toccò ran down to me with a ruzzolà in his hand.

"He went into the town before the sun was up; he left me this for you."

On it Pascarel had written, "I must go into Florence, but will be back ere sunset."

A great darkness fell on me. The bells seemed to be wailing for the dead.

It was only a day, indeed; but then I had dreamed such perfect dreams of this single little day amongst the red autumn leaves, hearing of his love forever and forever and forever, and yet never enough. Alone with him on these haunted sacred hills.

A lattice was thrown sharply open; a shrill voice called—

“He is gone into the town, and never let me know; and I want coffee, and pins, and a shoestring, and the saints know what not! and nothing is to be had in this beastly place, be it ever so. Toccò, run in the village and see if you can buy aught worth the eating. HE would never care if he lived on acorns!”

It was Brunóttà making her daily lamentation.

I rose, and wandered away out of hearing; that little sharp voluble voice jarred upon me.

Little Toccò passed me, running with a few scudi to do her errand.

I stayed him a moment on the hill.

“Do you know why he is gone?” I asked him, wistfully.

Toccò shook his curly head.

“Not I. But I think—at least the cowherd said so—that he seemed troubled as he left the house at day-dawn. Perhaps he is gone to pray for someone dead. It is the day of the dead, you know. But I must make haste, signorina, or Brunóttà will box my ears, surely.”

The lad flew down the slope and across the bridge to the village. I strayed away amongst the olives,

choosing hunger in that peace and stillness rather than encounter the perpetually ringing chimes of Brunóttá's chatter.

Under the wall of the Villa of Mario a dairy-woman gave me a draught of milk and a crust, and I wandered by myself all the morning, dreaming, dreaming, dreaming always of him. Of him alone.

Had he gone to pray for any dead that he loved?

My heart for a moment was heavy at the thought. I was jealous even of a memory that might be dear to him; but not for very long. He loved me now.

What matter the rest?

So many hands had touched the mandoline—yes, no doubt. But I had a sweet, vague sure instinct that one chord had been reached by me alone.

When the day had passed the meridian, all my spirits rose again. He had said that he would be back before sunset. I might hope for him every moment.

I returned through the fields and orchards lingeringly and happily; the mists had all lifted by noon.

It was another clear summer-like day. The golden cross of the duomo glittered in the hollow where the city lay.

In the village, the people, having prayed for their dead, were out in their holiday gear; they were talking cheerfully of the abundant vintage, and some of them were dancing under the red vine foliage to the sound of a flute and a fiddle.

I saw, afar off, Brunóttá, brave in a scarlet kirtle and white bodice, with the amber beads of St. John's Day round her throat, merrily footing the salterello with a brawny blacksmith of San Marco. Her white

teeth shone, her little rosy face laughed, her small plump feet twinkled ceaselessly, the sunshine fell about her, the gold and bronze of the dying vine leaves hung above her head; she was as happy as a grillo in the grasses.

I went into the garden of the capanna we had lodged at and sat down in a green nook of it, whence I could see the bridge and the white road beyond as it shelved down towards Florence.

I lost sight of the dancers under the vines, but I could watch him come up from the city, or fly to meet him if no one looked.

The little garden was gay with all kinds of autumn flowers; for the daughter of the house was one of the flowersellers of Florence. There were great bands of scarlet salvia blossoming, and many yellow heads of gourds and pumpkins.

A pergola stretched from the threshold to the garden wicket; grapes still hung on it, and the leafage was a brilliant tangle of red and green and gold. I sat on a bench in one corner of this, whence I could see the shallow sunlit river; children were wading in it with many joyous cries, and a grey mule was drinking at the ford.

I was shut in by the green leaves.

Now and then a great lustrous bee or moth went humming through the bean blossoms. I could see through the vine foliage the white wall of the house and the open window of the kitchen; the padrona went to and fro past the window in a white coif and a red petticoat, with copper vessels in her hands.

Lazily, every now and then, I lifted my arm over my head, and drew down one of the grapes off the

clusters that hung above there. A grey cat was walking slowly through the maze of the pumpkins on the ground. Beyond the garden walls there were the fields and the vineyards, and beyond all these again, Fiesole and the mountains.

Ave Maria bells were ringing dreamily down in the valdarno.

It was five of the clock in the afternoon; there was no light on the sun-dial on the wall, but a tawny glow like molten gold was shed over every thing from the western skies above the hills.

The rabbits were scudding with bustle and glee amongst the cabbages. Far away at the other end of the garden two little children were gathering great yellow pears off the side of a shed, eating and laughing as they filled the rush baskets with the fruit.

A white pigeon spread silver wings against the deep cloudless blue of the sky. The houseleek on the red sloping roof turned to vivid gold. The woman of the house hummed to herself fragments of song as she went to and fro past her open window; and I could hear the merry music of the flute where the villagers were still dancing.

Why do I think of all these things? I do not know: only the leaves and the flowers, and the beasts and the unconscious people that have all been about one in any great misery seem to become a portion of it, and burn themselves into one's brain—forever.

The sadness of the daybreak had passed away from me with the vanished mists. My future seemed to glow before me—golden, beautiful, indistinct, sacred, as the cross of the cathedral glowed down in the valley.

I sat and dreamed over the tender music of his voice, which could lend to the simplest phrase or commonest greeting all the eloquence of a caress.

For the last time in my life I was happy with that perfect happiness only possible in extreme youth, which is only half conscious of itself, and does not awaken to question either its wisdom or its hereafter.

After a while there was a rustle and a step, and Brunóttá, hot and tired, pushed her way through the leaves.

She stopped short as she saw me.

"I thought you were on the hills, signorina," she said, sullenly, and stood posed on one foot, like a little sulky bird, as her habit was when not quite at her ease.

I looked up and smiled on her. I loved every living thing that day, and though she had been capricious and out of temper with me recently, I had never forgotten all the goodness she had shown me in the early days of my wanderings with the Arte.

"Have you had a good dance, Brunóttá?" I asked her. "I saw you in the village with that big black Domenico."

"There is no harm in stretching one's limbs awhile," said Brunóttá, sulkily, as though I had accused her of some fault. "I went to mass in the morning, of course. Of course one always prays for the dead. They never haunt you if you do. Though, for the matter of that, I knew a good soul in Casentino who paid a dozen masses every Quaresima to keep her husband quiet in his grave, and it was all not one bit of use; he was a pedlar, and was thought murdered for good and all

by brigands, but just when she was married to a rich poulterer, and comfortable, he came to life again, and all the church money was wasted that she had paid for six years and more;—if that was not enough to try a woman!—still, I always say prayers for them, for they can do one a great deal of hurt if they like. And I am always afraid my old father may come any night, for there was a matter of fifteen soldi for goat's milk that we quarrelled about the very day he fell down in a fit; and his very last words were, 'If I get out of my grave, I will have those soldi, you wicked wench.' He said that even with L'Olio Santo upon him."

And Brunóttá paused, overcome with her recollections, looking vaguely and still sulkily at me, as she rested one foot on the other.

I listened with a little wonder; it was the first time she had ever spoken of her father, though she had often told me of the cruelties of her foster-mother in Casentino; and this dying thought of the soldi seemed to me wholly unlike the gay, ironical, humorous and whimsically proud man whom Pascarel had so often described to me as the graver of the prince's coronet upon the old tin tinker's pot.

Moreover, if Pascarel had been fifteen when his father had died, how could Brunóttá, who was so many many years younger than he, remember the dead man at all?

"You mean your foster-mother's husband?" I said, looking away down the white road and thinking little of her, only eagerly watching for the shadow so familiar and so dear to me to fall across the sunny bridge.

"I mean my father," said Brunóttá, stubbornly, and was silent, with the guilty, conscious, cunning look upon her face that she had worn on the day of the San Giovanni.

I did not think much of her.

My eyes went across the bridge to that little white glimpse of road on which with every second I hoped to see the elastic slender figure, the white dress, the dark oval face, like an old picture, that I had so often watched for in such happy hours, but never watched for with such a beating, eager, tremulous heart as now.

When at last I looked at her she was still in the same position, looking like an angered chidden child, but with a certain apprehensive cunning on her ruddy face.

"Why, Brunóttá, how you stare at me!" I cried, growing a little tired of her gaze. "Is there anything strange in me to-day?"

In answer, her lip fell, her plump shoulders heaved, and she began to sob aloud.

My heart stood still with terror. My fancy flew to every kind of evil that might have befallen him.

"What is it?" I cried, breathless with fear. "Any accident—any sorrow—to him?"

Brunóttá dropped at my feet in the dust, a little ruffled heap, like a gay-plumaged bird that is beaten down by the rain.

"*He* is well enough! Or I daresay he is," she muttered, sitting there upon the sand.

She caught hold of my skirts with both hands, and hid her face, and began to sob aloud.

"No, no, he is well enough. It is you, signorina,

Will you go away, and let us be happy once more? We were so happy before you came. I have been telling him so, ever so many days past, but it is all no use. You have bewitched him, and he cares nothing for me. Will you be generous and go away? You are so handsome, and men care so much for you. It will be sure to be well with you anywhere."

"Go away!" I echoed, stupidly. I thought I could not fairly be awake.

"I was so sorry for you in the wood that day," she went on, pushing my skirts aside, and speaking in petulant passion, while her round black eyes swam in tears. "Ah, Holy Gesù! It is always one's good deeds that turn round and sting us like wasps. It is very hard to do right in this world. It costs one so much. And I was fond of you, donzella; oh yes! I am fond of you still, if only you will go right away. I will pray for you night and morning to our own black Madonna of Impruneta, and she will look after you, and see you want for nothing. I am sure she will if I ask her; for I never miss mass on her feasts—not once; and whenever I have owed her a candle for any good that she did me I always have paid it, in the very finest wax, too. She will care for you, that I am sure; and, besides, what will you want for, anywhere? You can do as you will with men. There is no strength like that strength. It comes to one here and there, in tens of millions, they say; and you have it. I do not grudge you it. Oh no. I would not have you think that——"

"Think what?" I cried to her, still amazed and bewildered, and not dreaming the truth.

"That I am jealous of you. Oh no, I am not jealous.

But if you would just go away. We were so well till you came. That first night he was wise and I the fool. He said to me, 'Why bind up with our hedgerow flowers this beautiful stray hot-house rose?' And I, like a fool, only laughed at him, and saw no harm. Though, of course, I might have known full well what the end would be. He will kill me, I daresay, for speaking to you. So he must. I would rather die."

I rose and drew away the hem of my dress with which her hands were nervously playing. I looked down on her in incredulous amaze.

"Are you mad, Brunóttá? What is it you mean? How can I hurt you? Cannot you speak simply and straightly, and say what it is that you want?"

She cast a scared glance down the long green aisle of the pergola to make herself sure she was not overheard: there was only at the farther end the white wall of the house and the open casement, with the woman still moving to and fro and still singing.

"I mean you to go away," she muttered, under her breath, with a certain sound almost of fierceness in her voice. "To leave him. Cannot you understand?"

"No, I do not understand. Why should you want me away? You were the first who asked me to stay. You mean something more, Brunóttá. Speak out——"

"I know I was the first to ask you to wait with us," she cried, with a great sob, half of pain, half of passion. "Have I not said it is always what we do best that most hurts us. It is always so. I speak as plainly as I can. I tell you to go.

"He will kill me, no doubt; so he must. From the very first you bewitched him.

"I might have known a man as poor as Pascarel does not give away twelve gold florins, making believe they were got back from a thief, without love having something to say in it. He worked very hard to make up those florins; he did all kinds of coopers' and copersmiths' work ever so long, and you never knew.

"You were so glad to get back your florins you believed any follies he told you.

"He has loved you from the first, that I am sure. That day when he half killed the Sicilian it was out of rage for you, not for me. And only look at him now!

"Before he saw you, there was not such a gay-hearted, mischief-loving, careless creature in all the country. He loved his wine, and his wit, and his comrades, and his nonsense, and he had kisses and jests for every woman he met. I was never jealous of *them*.

"And now not once in ten times will he sup with the men when they ask him: as for the women, he never looks at one; and when he is alone—I mean when you are not there—he just sits dreaming, dreaming, dreaming, and never a word to throw at a dog!"

She paused, breathless from the rapidity and vehemence of her words, and I stood as breathless before her. My face burned; my heart beat; my brain whirled. All wonder, all offence, all amazement, were drowned in me under the flood of my own delicious happiness—he loved me.

I did not think to answer her. I was thinking only of that perfect sympathy, this unutterable gladness, which bound my life to his with silver cords.

A strolling player! I could have laughed aloud in delicious mockery of my old dead pride. A tinker's son! What matter? I cried in my heart; I knew him a king amongst men.

The little shrill, petulant voice of Brunóttá came strangely on my ears, as though from far, very far away.

"He will kill me if ever he know!" she was crying. "For he said to me that first night when we had found you in the wood, 'Not a word, Brunóttá, never a word—as you value my love and your life.' And I promised him; nay, I swore by all the saints that I would never tell.

"No doubt they will burn me below, sometime, for that; though if they put women in hell for just breaking their word, I cannot think how they find room in the place.

"It is bad to break a promise, I know. But I have begged Pascarèl to send you away from us, and he will not. And so at last I must speak, and I will. It is three years ago last San Giovanni's day since he said to me, 'Piccinina, will you wander with me?'

"We were at the fireworks on the Carraia bridge, you know, and I was frightened and screamed because a rocket fell near me; and he lifted me down into a boat he had got on the river; and there were young men with him, and coloured lanthorns, and wines and sweetmeats, and they sang; and it was all so merry and good, that when he asked me I thought the life would be one big feast day always.

"And I was so sick of the casentino, and the goats and the straw-plaiting; and one had to tell a thousand lies to get a scudo for oneself, the old people were so

sharp and so mean; and then all one's savings went in absolution, of course; and such a fuss to get leave to go off to a fair as never was, and such a rage if a youngster kissed one! I remember being beaten black and blue by the old woman after this very fair up here at Fiesole because I went to have my fortune told at the Buda, and there was a brave-looking boy from Prato who was full of money, and——"

She stopped and coloured all over to the brown rings of her pretty hair, and glanced at me with cunning eyes, whilst I listened, comprehending nothing that she said, and waiting in astonished silence to hear the purport of her words.

"So you see, signorina," she went on, breathlessly, "I thought to myself, when Pascarel in his boat, said to me, half joking, 'Pretty bird, will you fly away with us?' I thought to myself I would jump at it, and get away once and for all from the goats and the plaiting; and then, you know, Pascarel looks like a marquis; and I knew I should dance as much as ever I liked; and who could tell that he had it in him to be such a tyrant, and would make such a fuss about taking a trinket?"

"Ever since that Giovanni's night I have been true to him, quite true to him, that I vow; and if I have had a neckkerchief here and an earring there from a man or two, what does it signify?"

"I have never given anything back for it, that I swear by all the saints—scarce a fair word even, for Pascarel is so fierce. And how can one live in a playhouse as if one were in a convent? It is ridiculous to say such things; and if one may not laugh and gossip, whatever is life worth having?"

"And I have put up with all that, though at my age one does not like to be cooped up like an abbess; and I have borne with his temper—and it can be a horrid one, as you might see that day with poor Rossello Brùn—and I have always had a care that he should have a good supper, though for himself he never knows whether he is eating a capon or a crow.

"And then all in a minute it is the donzella this, the donzella that, and one is set aside in everything—a stranger, who has not even so much as a silver bodkin for her hair that she can call her own.

"But if you will go away it will be well again.

"It is your face bewitches him; and that pretty, proud, saucy way you have with you. But if you will go away he will think nothing about you in a month. He forgets very soon, does Pascarel."

I heard her in perfect bewilderment, my thoughts too astray in their own sweet confusion for me to be able fairly to seize the sense of her words.

"But, Brunóttà, I cannot understand," I murmured. "Why should you not have come with your brother when you found him on Giovanni's night? and why should I be asked to go away now that he——"

I stopped abruptly. My face burned, and I turned a little away from her. I remembered that the affection between us was his secret, and must not be given to the winds by me.

Brunóttà's hands clutched nervously at the scarlet fringes of her dancing skirt; her face paled a little under its ruddy brown; her eyes glanced slyly through the leaves; she strained her throat to see that there was no hearer in the little garden or at the wicket in the acacia hedge; then she dropped her head sullenly,

and, with a little cunning laugh, like a child when it has broken some precious toy, muttered beneath her breath—

“Signorina, he is not my brother!”

“Not your brother?” I echoed, vaguely.

Her meaning did not dawn on me. I had never been deceived by any creature; so far as I knew, no one had ever told me an untruth; to give and receive good faith had always seemed to me a law of life as natural as to draw the breath.

And of any evil I had but the most shadowy conception. There were women in the world who were wicked; so much I knew; but of what shape or meaning their wickedness took I had but the vaguest imagining.

“No! Nobody but a baby like you would ever have believed that folly,” said Brunóttá, still crouched at my feet in the dust, her fingers plucking at her scarlet fringe. “How you should ever have believed it I cannot think. There have been thousands and thousands of things that ought to have told you if you had not been as blind as an owl in the daylight. But if you will just go away, it will be as if it never had been. You must never say that I told you; he would murder me. Go away quietly. You will come to no harm. You have a face that is your friend anywhere. And I will pray to our Lady for you, I will, honestly, and she will have a care of you. Whenever I have promised her anything I have always paid it faithfully. We fell in with a horrible storm off Catania once, and I vowed her three pounds of candles if we got out of it safe, and I bought them in the very finest wax and

offered them up at San Frediano the moment I set foot in Florence——”

“Not your brother?” I echoed, dreamily watching the grey cat straying amongst the pumpkins. “You mean you were only his foster-sister. I am not astonished at that.”

“He is no brother of mine at all,” she retorted, sullenly. “I tell you he is no kith nor kin of mine. I only saw him for the first time that San Giovanni’s day three years and more ago. I had never set eyes upon him before. You might have guessed at once—only you are such a baby. And I never would have told you, only I know you love him yourself, and he loves you.”

I listened with a strange sound like rushing waters beating at my brain. I did not understand, and yet the green fields, the red vine-leaves, the evening sky, that had grown grey as the sun had sunk behind the hills—all eddied round me in a dizzy maze.

A man—any man, however base, I think—would have had pity on my innocence and bewilderment. But a woman who is jealous has no pity, and Brunóttá had none.

She laughed, a forced little laugh, hard, cunning, and cruel—a laugh of envy and vengeance together.

“How strange you look, signorina! I am sure I never dreamt you half believed that story. Who that had eyes in their heads *could* think he was my brother?”

“Not your brother?” I echoed the words mechanically.

That falsehoods were daily human food, that a lie was the small brass coinage in which the interchange

of the world was carried on to the equal convenience of all, was a truth of which I had no suspicion.

"Not your brother!" I repeated again. "What do you mean? What is he, then?"

A deadly coldness clutched at my heart as I spoke. I did not know what I feared or what I thought, but a great woe seemed suddenly to gather close about me.

Brunóttá threw herself on her knees at my feet in the chequered shadows from the foliage overhead. She sobbed convulsively in a passion of repentance and of tears.

"I had sworn to him never to tell you. And now I have told; and he will kill me if ever he know.

"When we met you in the wood that miserable day, and I, like a fool, asked you to join your life with ours, he took me aside, and he said to me, 'What does the donzella think that we are to each other?' And I answered him that you had taken it into your head that I was his sister, and that I had not contradicted you—that was all.

"Then he said to me, 'So let it rest, then. Mark my word; I will not have her ears soiled with the truth. She is innocence itself. If she go with us she must never know. It is a sorry sort of protection, but she might fall under worse.' And that night he made me solemnly promise him—nay, I swore to the saints—that I would never tell you the truth of my relation with him.

"I meant to keep my word; I did, indeed. I never was tempted to break it till that storm about Rosello Brùn. That made me feel mad against you.

"At first I had thought, 'She is a donzella; she will find her own great people; it will only be for a

little space.' And I felt a sort of love for you; I did indeed. You were so different to me.

"But after that my eyes were opened, and I have watched him, and I have seen that it was you whom he loved, and not me any longer; and then I have thought and thought, 'If I let her stay with him, soon he will not so much as cast a look at me,' and that made me mad; and I said to myself, 'Why should I be so coy with her, and not tell her the truth, when it is easy to see she would ask nothing better than to be in my place.'

"The people do nought but talk of him and you. They know what such *amicizia* means, if you do not; and very nice it is for me to hear their jokes at my expense.

"And then to hearken to him, always—the donzella this and that, and such care had of you as if you were a princess born, when all the while you are a lesser thing than I, for what, pray, do you ever do to get your bread? But I wash, and bake, and stew, and mend his linen, and do all manner of things—to say nothing of my bringing in money for him by my dancing; while you lead a life like any cockered-up peacock on a villa terrace, though all the time, as everyone knows, it costs Pascarèl half the theatre's receipts to keep you and to pay your lodgings.

"And yesterday I saw him look at you—just with that look in his eyes that it is like a sorcery for one; and I would not wait any longer. I said, 'She shall know to-day, and I will see if she will go, or if she will wait and oust me and take my place. It is best to know the worst straight at once.'

I stood and heard.

CHAPTER V.

Nightfall.

I REMEMBER staring at the russet leaves and the blue sky, at the children under the pear-tree and the grey cat that walked amongst the yellow pumpkins. And that it could be the same world, that it could be going on in the same light and laughter, seemed to me horrible, hideous, incredible.

For me the world was dead.

I did not speak; I did not move.

Brunóttá grovelled, frightened and sobbing, at my feet. The beautiful vine foliage, the drooping grapes, the shimmering of sunrays through the darkness of the leaves, the blaze of sunset light on the white wall beyond, the gleam of scarlet from the woman's kerchief moving to and fro in the window, the silver glisten of the earrings in the bowed head at my feet—they went giddily round, and round, and round in a sickening whirl of colour before my blinded eyes.

For many and many a month afterwards, whenever I closed my eyes at night, I saw them still.

"You will not tell him, donzella?" whispered the poor, little, treacherous, cowardly creature on the earth before me, clutching closer the hem of my skirts. "You do not know what his passion can be. He would kill me. He would kill me surely. If you do not care for him, go away; go straight away, and I shall be happy again; he so soon forgets. But if you love him, as I think, best say so to me straight out. I will make an end of my life some way; it does not hurt much. And I could not live to stand by and see you take my place ——"

"Your place!"

The outrage broke the spell that held me paralysed. Poor, little, foolish, ignorant, coarse-fibred soul! How could she know the shame she did me? How could she tell the unbearable torture to me of that level with herself to which all ignorantly she dragged me.

But in the pain and desperation of my wound I was incapable of excuse or justice for her.

I was stunned and maddened by the shock of the first sense of falsehood, the first perception of evil, the first horror of treachery that had ever touched me.

Some indescribable unknown guilt seemed to rise around me, like noxious fumes of baleful fires, and stifle all the young life in me. Of the sin of the world I knew nothing; of the treason of it I knew as little.

That I had been betrayed, insulted, outraged, was rather an instinct with me than any reasoned knowledge. He had deceived me; that was all I knew, and all I cared to know.

She grovelled in the sand before me, clutching my skirts, bathing my feet with her tears, beseeching me not to reveal her broken troth to him.

When I thought that he had loved her, and then loved me—oh God! how wretched, base, and poor a thing I grew in my own sight!

I loathed myself as much as I loathed her; and yet, great heavens! how I hated her, because his lips had touched hers; because she, too, had known that touch, that smile, that kiss which, child as I was, I would have given my life away to win one hour!

And *he* loved *her*! this timorous, treacherous, base-

born, base-bred fool, who was not even true to him, who had not even such poor, simple, natural virtue in her as lies in loyalty and in good faith.

All the blood in me burned like a flame. I drew my skirts from her grasp, and thrust her away with my foot. Looking back on the unutterable passion and horror of that time, I wonder now I did not strike her.

I understand how men strike women—men who are not cowards either.

"You will not tell him?" she moaned, dragging herself upon her knees again to me. "You will not tell him? You do not know how violent he can be in his rage. You will not tell him? He would kill me."

I thrust her again from me with an unutterable loathing. He had loved her! loved this craven thing which could dare betray him, and yet not dare to brave his vengeance.

"No; I will not tell him," I answered her; the words seemed to suffocate me as I spoke.

She had been good to me once; in her way she had shown me hospitality and good will; she was safe from any revenge of mine.

A sudden fear seemed to fall on her with my answer; not fear for herself, but fear of me. No doubt my face looked strange to her—there, where I stood in the vine shadows, with the golden sunset world reeling around me, and all the beauty of my young life struck dead in me at one blow.

"Are you going away?" she muttered, under her breath. "How you look! I wish now I had not told you. If you love him indeed so much——"

I seized and shook her, mute.

"Oh fool, fool, fool!" I cried to her. "Have you no fear that *I* may kill you?"

I thrust her away once again with such violence that she was driven from me, like a spurned dog, under the shadows of the leaves; and she shivered a little and crouched, and then rose slowly on her feet and stood shivering and sore afraid. But I had taught her silence.

I left her there, and went down the green length of the pergola, out of the gold of the sunny garden, across the archway of the threshold, and so on into the darkness and the coldness of the house.

At every step I dreaded to hear the voice of Pascarel.

I went up to my own little room, and barred the door, and flung myself on my bed in a stupor of misery.

All my faith in God and man seemed killed in me.

CHAPTER VI.

Along the Mountains.

AGAINST the little square of the open window the breeze gently blew the clusters of roses that had climbed there; the chirp of the birds was shrill on the silence; there was a soft splash of water below as some one filled and refilled the metal pail at the well. All these things were distinct to me and horrible. My love was dead; why were not all other things dead too?

I did not cry aloud, and my eyes were dry; what

I had heard, and the shame of it, seemed to have scorched and shrivelled all the life in me. I was little more than a child. I was all instinct; I had no reason. I abandoned myself without meditation or analysis to any impulse of the moment.

My love for him had been one of the noblest, sweetest, purest impulses of my life. It had been better than myself. All love, if it be worth anything, is higher than the nature that begets it.

My love had subjugated all weaker and vainer things in me; it had vanquished my pride, and my selfishness had been subdued and destroyed by it.

It had been passionless because quite childlike; it had been quite happy only to see him come and go, to have the clasp of his hand, to listen to his fancies and his dreams; it had possibly irritated him often by its unconsciousness and its contentment in so little; and yet it had been intense with all its innocence, and, in its way, perfect.

Had I been older I should have paused and weighed awhile these cruel doubts that had fallen on me, like drops of scalding lead upon an open wound.

Had I been truer and more faithful I should have known that the love of a woman to be worth aught must be dog-like, and take good and evil alike in implicit faith, and kiss the cherished hand that deals the blow.

Had I been wiser in the world's wisdom I should have been able to measure the emptiness and the weariness of these mindless ties, of the soulless bondage woven that fatal night, when, for sake of a rosy face and a smiling mouth, he had said, "will you

wander with me?" as the boat shot away in the moonlight.

But I was only a child, and I loved him with a child's ignorance and a woman's narrowness, and I was only alive to the one intolerable unutterable shame which seemed to fall on me with the coarse invective of this creature, who begrudged her place to me.

And with it all, a nobler despair, a deadlier woe, smote me in the sense—so slow to dawn on me, so blasphemous, as it still seemed to me—that he could have told a falsehood to me, that he could have let me live on and on and on, unthinking and unsuspecting, in the tainted sunshine, in the plague-smitten beauty, of a paradise of lies.

Since then I have known passions that beside it were as the rushing stream of lava beside the limpid mountain burn; yet I doubt if I have ever known a love, more purely and perfectly love, than this I then bore to Pascarèl.

And it was all dead—worse than dead; struck in the eyes, as it were, with all the insult of a blinding blow. At a stroke, the words of this poor false fool, had dragged it down from the heaven of its innocent exaltation, and levelled it with all that was poorest, basest, meanest, coarsest, in the acrid jealousies of women and the amorous infidelities of men.

Her jealousy degraded me in my own sight.

Beyond every other thing I was proud. The evil had been subdued by his influence, but never uprooted; beneath the sting of torture it rose up in tenfold strength.

"Take her place—take her place!"

I said the words that had outraged me a thousand times over and over again between my locked teeth. There were times when the ferocity of a beast awoke in me, and I was on fire to spring at her throat and kill her.

For he had loved her once: so I believed, at least; I who knew nothing of men or women either.

Nothing of the brevity of the mere desire of the senses. Nothing of the leaden weight of a sensual bondage. Nothing of the languid reluctance of a sated fancy to strike and free itself. Nothing of the indolent impulses and mindless passions with which the heart of a man may be drawn hither and thither without once touching or sighting the goal of its ideal. Nothing of all which might have given pardon to him, to her, to myself.

The innocence of youth is cruel, because it is of necessity also ignorance, and ignorance is cruelty always.

I did not stir, my eyes were never wet, no cry escaped me; but where I lay, face downward, as I had flung myself, I bit through and through, like a wild animal that is trapped, the woollen coverture of my little pallet bed.

The time went on; the robins ceased to sing, the roses blew against the window frame; when I looked up it was quite dark, and there were stars shining.

I heard the pressure of a foot upon the woodwork of the old, rickety, worm-eaten door, a feeble, little, sobbing voice began to mutter through it to me of a thousand selfish terrors. The sound of it stung me to blind fury; he would be home at sunset; home to

her and me; one at the least I vowed to heaven he should not find there.

I had no space for hesitance, no time for thought; there was but one way—I was young and supple as a willow bough, and mad with pain—I sprang on the stone coping of the casement, turned and grasped the network of the rose-stems, and the boughs of the fig, knotted and tough from half a century of sun and storm.

Then holding by that hazardous support, I let my body drop along the surface of the leaf-covered wall, dragging a ruin of rose leaves as I fell. The house was very old and low: I touched the grass beneath with a dull shock, but without violence; as I reached the earth I heard above the crash and splinter of the panels forced and driven in before the blows of some one whom Brunótta had summoned in her affright.

It was quite dark; the garden was deserted; I paused an instant to draw my breath; with the soft shower of the rose leaves still like tears upon my face.

I felt bodily pain, but that only served to madden me, as the lash maddens a beast already bruised; I leaped the low stone wall of the garden and flew like a lapwing into the dusky shadows.

Little Toccò leaned over the wall that parted the garden from the olive orchards. He was singing clearly a sweet merry melody, and gazing down through the gloom to try and see who passed across the bridge. I crept up to him and slid into his hand the onyx with the Fates.

"Give it to him when he comes," I murmured.

The boy started and stared, no doubt at the changed sound of my voice; but dreading lest he should detain me, I thrust the stone into his hold and fled away through the shadows before he well knew who had spoken to him.

Behind me I heard a noise of many voices, and as the household of the little place roused itself to its Padrona's summons. Turning my head once I saw lights flash in its windows and underneath the trellis of its pergola. I held straight onward, running with winged feet where the grass lands allowed my passage, stumbling and slipping where the maples and the vines woven together opposed my progress.

At times I fell into the trenches cut in the hard soil against the hill floods of winter. At times I bruised myself on the tangled sticks of dying vines.

At times I lost myself amongst the thickets of olive, shining white as the winding-sheets of ghostly apparitions. At times I sank over my feet in shallow brooks that rippled from the mountains, and went on with my garments heavy-weighted with the moisture.

At times I crouched in some shed or under some sheaves of maize to get my breath, and then I saw scattered over the country, close about the little wine-shops, the lights of lanterns that flickered fitfully in and out amongst the foliage; and then I gave myself no rest, but gathered my skirts close and ran again.

At length—it may have been one hour, it may have been three or four, by the look of the stars it was quite night—one of the vineyards that I crossed opened abruptly and without fence upon a highway on which I heard the sound of a horse's feet.

Looking behind I saw no lights; there was only the great brooding darkness of the deserted country, with here and there a silvery gleam as some ray of the young moon caught a belt of olives, or a breadth of water.

I went into the road and waited there. To be beyond their reach I knew I must not pause to rest amidst my flight. I knew, too, that I was nearly at the end of all my force.

Through the gloom there came towards me a white horse, with a red woollen covering spread over it in the Tuscan fashion, dragging slowly a contadino's cart.

As it drew near me I saw, by the light of the lantern which hung at the shafts, that the peasant was an old man of seventy or eighty years.

His cart swayed heavily backward on its wheels; it was filled with straw and earthenware; he dozed as he went, and the horse picked its own way amongst the stones at will.

I called to him and stopped him; he awoke, thinking of roadside robbers, and began to mutter incoherent prayers to a leaden saint in the band of his hat.

I made him, with difficulty, understand that I was harmless and alone and tired, and that if he would give me a lift for a league or two I would pay him well. When he had recovered his alarm, he told me that he was going with his pottery to a fair at Settignano; that to get a good place amongst the stalls it behoved traders to be there whilst the dawn was grey; that he never hurried or harassed his beast, and so had started at nightfall to make his journey by easy stages.

He hesitated some time over my offer, then yielded.

The cart was a light one, he said, and my weight was light too; it would not harm the horse; I might get in amongst the straw if first he saw my money.

I gave him the little gold piece that my father had given me on the stairs in Verona; it had been slung round my neck with the onyx. He let me climb up amidst the rough pottery of his trade stock, and the patient beast set forward again upon its road; the old man settled himself again to doze at ease; the cart creaked onward down the steepness of the slopes, the lantern glimmering redly in the gloom.

He paused a long time in the desolate grey piazza of Fiesole.

All the town was asleep upon its high hills, but there was some friend he knew dwelling by the church who at his rap hung out a lantern on a hook in the wall, and brought him a flask of wine, over which they talked long together in the darkness.

Then the horse jogged on again along the stony gloomy roads, on and on and on into the oak woods of Borgunto, where the great masses of wooded hills sloped away, above and below, in an intense stillness, only broken by the cry of an owl.

It is a winding and difficult road that passes along the side of the mountain from the town of Fiesole to the old fortress of Poggibonzi, and the agony of the slow and weary way seemed endless.

After awhile the clouds broke and the moon shone out; through the oak leaves one could see the vast

silent valley stretched far, far below, and the amphitheatre of the endless hills encircling it. Even in my stupor and misery I had some vague sense of its wonderful, solemn, mystical shadowy beauty.

Only a week or two before we had gone up that road on our way from Casentino to the annual fair of S. Francis at Fiesole, and we had talked of Masaccio and Desiderio as we saw their little white town on the slopes, and had gathered the wild anemones that covered the ground with bloom, and had sung songs to the mandoline, passing under the acacias by the fortress walls, and mounting higher and higher and higher with a gay good-morrow to the smith at the mountain forge.

Only a week or two before! And now!

The hours passed in a horrible nightmare for me. The cart shook, jolted, rattled on the stones; my body was bruised and lacerated by the thickets and the vines; the palms of my hands were bleeding from the thorns of the rose-trees; the night was very cold, as autumn nights are, north of the Abruzzi. But the misery of my thoughts killed in me all sense of bodily pain.

All I heard was the sweet music of his voice. The music lost to me for evermore.

The night seemed endless.

The horse often paused to rest and crop a little of the wayside grass or drink at some stone tank in a monastery wall.

The old contadino awoke now and then to say a word to it, or to trim his lantern, then slept again, while the rope of the reins dropped idly from his wrists.

The road seemed interminable, going down, down, down, along the face of the hills, always with the same stretches of olives and vines on either side, always with the dark vapours of the plain spread like a sea beneath. Now and then an owl flew by with a low croak; now and then there shone a little gleam from some lamp at a roadside shrine—that was all the change there was.

The cart crawled on under the boughs and past the dusky stone walls, still down, down, down into the lower wood, where the oak is changed for the fir tree, and the path becomes sharp and sheer and bent into curves that make the stoutest mule stumble.

The first grey of daybreak had scarcely lightened in the skies when the horse paused at a turn in the descent. The old pottery dealer woke for the first time with eyes wide opened, shook himself, and descended from his seat.

The old man roused me roughly.

“Signorina, you had best get out here if you want Florence. I go to Settignano, and that will be out of your road. Keep straight on, and go down, down, always, and you cannot miss to come to the Croce Gate.”

The cart jolted on its way to Masaccio’s birthplace, and I staggered, blind, and sick down under the stone-pines.

I felt feeble, broken, aged by ten years. My head was giddy, and the sunshine swam around me in bright rings of amber. I felt numb, and, when I moved, the earth seemed hollow and tremulous beneath my feet.

So, like one blindfolded, I stumbled down into the City that is called Beautiful.

CHAPTER VII.

The Church of the Cross.

It was full sunrise.

The light was streaming from the east, golden and glistening as it came gleaming across the desert. In the streets deep shadows still slept. Lithe brown hands were unloosening the wooden lattices, and flowers pent in casements thrust their heads out to the air.

All was very quiet.

There was only the sound of the bells tolling for the first mass of the churches, tolling everywhere, north and south, east and west, over the wide val-darno. Here and there a priest passed to some holy office; here and there a sun-belated reveller went gaily home touching a mandoline; here and there a woman with brown bare arms swept down her steps or hung her linen out of window, gossiping the while to neighbours across the passage-way.

It all went giddily and dimly round before my sight. I was faint, and my limbs shook as I dragged them over the stones.

There was a sound of footsteps and of outcries behind me.

On the sheer instinct of the hunted deer, I paused and shrank into the shade, and gazed around for shelter. Close against me the doors of the S. Croce stood open. The vast, dark, solemn church yawned like a grave. I crept into the shadow of its porch.

At its altars they were saying the first mass.

A lady, all lace and jewels, as she had come from some palace ball, was on her knees in the dusk and the solitude praying, while the voices of the priests echoed dully under the vast vaulted roof that shelters the dust of Michelangelo and Giotto.

Behind me were the darkness, the coldness, the peace of the great church, the lights burning dimly far away, the sepulchral undertones thrilling the stillness.

Before me, in the open air, there came, swift as the wind, a rush of feet, a clamour of angered voices, a shower of weapons, a tramp of horses, a cloud of dust, a flash of daylight, and, in the midst, a gleam of beautiful bold eyes that last had looked at me in the white moonshine underneath the leaves away on the hill-side by Dante's Solitude.

The crowd went by like a whirl of dust and of leaves on a day of scirocco. I sprang and caught the arm of an old man who had uncovered his head reverently as it went by the church.

"What is it? Oh, nothing," he said, with a shadowy smile. "Nothing. They broke on the wheel in *my* time. How scared you look, you pretty child. It is only the ducal guard who are taking Pascarel to the Bargello; and the people want to rescue him, that is all. Done? No, he has done nothing that I know of; but the town cares for him, and he tells awkward truths, and it has been easy to seize the salt in his speech and tax it. There was a sort of riot yesterday, and he quelled it; but they made that an offence against him. A player and a populano! What right has he to power?—to such power as Love gives and

gets? So they arrested him last night, and they take him now to the Podestà for judgment. I daresay they will give him three months in prison. For the Bargello is strong and the people are weak as yet."

The old man, still with that subtle wintry smile upon his face, shook my hold off him, and went feebly along the street.

The crowd in its cloud of dust had passed from sight. I lost all sense of where I was, and fell, like one dead, upon the stones of Florence.

BOOK VI.

THE QUARTER OF THE DOVE.

CHAPTER I.

Oltrarno.

You know the old old quarter, whose emblem on the banners that were borne in war around the red Carroccio, was the Silver Dove? The church is there, though flame has ravaged it thrice; but the standard that bore the bird of the Holy Spirit over the reek and carnage of the plains has crumbled away none know whither in some closet or crypt of the city.

Yet the quarter is barely changed at all, since in the days of the Republic the men of San Lorenzo and of San Giovanni crossed the river to sack it from end to end under the storm of arrows and the rain of fire.

It is dark, and dull, and noisy, and noisome there in the old historic quarter of the Silver Dove: and yet it is so full of story, so sacred, with so many names and memories, that there is a charm about its twisting gloomy streets, its high walls shutting out the sun, its dungeon-like chambers, its iron-bound palaces, grim and firm set as sea-washed cliffs, its huge archways dark as Erebus, its narrow passages where two mules can scarce pass one another over the slippery and uneven stones.

It is all haunted ground in old Oltrarno. Come

to it in a summer morning. There is no sun in it, except in some square-walled garden behind the frowning front of some antique, coronetted house, where stray sunbeams make a glory on shining lemon-boughs and broken water-cisterns. It is all dark, for the houses are so high, and the walls lean so close. It is full of the strange, dreamy old-world Florentine odour, that smells always as though some king's coffin had been freshly opened, and the spices and the perfumes of the cere-clothes lately loosened on the air. The people are walking, leaning, gossiping, laughing, quarrelling, all in the open street, and at the open threshold. The cobbler is at his stall; the tinker at his barrow; the huckster at his board of cloths and linens; the melon-seller at his truck of green paponi. In every one of the great dusky interiors there is an etching worthy of Rembrandt. In every one of the sculptured, unglazed windows, there is a study of colour fit for Velasquez. It is all dark, and dusty, and noisy, and noisome, I say, and yet in its way it is beautiful—the place is so gruesome, and the people are so gay.

And then—so many steps are echoing after yours, so many faces look at you from the grated windows.

See—in that dim street there is old Toscanelli's white head bending over the charts busy with vague dreams of the unknown world across the seas;—yonder enters a saucy, airy, ribboned, plumed cavaliere, who sings a stornello as he goes, and fingers the sprig of box with which he is playing the Lenten love game, begun in Carnival with the original of Madama Pampinet;—away behind the Carmine church, where gentle Masaccio came and painted in his title-deeds to im-

mortality, runs a little barefoot, ragged imp, his mouth full of stolen convent cherries, whom poor old Mona Lapaccia tries to catch and lead to the good friars to be fed and clothed, and made in his due time into Fra Lippl;—under the deep shadows of the walls there goes to his sombre and frugal home the finest wit and keenest logician of the Rucellai Gardens, musing on sore straits of personal poverty, and foreseeing, perhaps, with a certain delicate, cynical sadness, that he who lives with clean hands the honestest of men in Florence will so pass down to posterity that the name of Machiavelli will be used, to all time, as synonym for Prince of Rogues.

See there—who comes down hither in the gloaming of the last night of Carnival? by the corner that is called of the Lion, under the shade of the Carmelite's church? Handsome and reckless still, as when he, Benvenuto, hurled defiance at Diane de Poitiers from the Tour de Nesle,—prince of craftsmen and king of egotists—since his eyes opened to the light in the little house in the Chiara street, full of its flutes and clavecins and harpsichords, its mirrors of silver and its viols of ivory, wherein, in the winter nights, the old father sat “singing all to himself” by his brave oak fires for pride and gladness of heart, because a son was born to him and to the city. He is come to seek the recreant Tonino,—he has left his workshop in the Mercato strewn with grotesques in gold and acanthus leaves in silver, and blazonries in enamel, and lilies in diamonds, and poniards in damascened metal;—the sword that hangs by his belt was red a little while ago in the sack of Rome;—the gold crowns in his pouch are payments for Fontainebleau

from King Francis—he is in anger and in haste, yet going thus through the darkness to the ingrate monk he thinks a little wistfully, great artist and reckless liver though he be, of the old days when he and Michelangelo, and Piloto, the goldsmith, used to saunter hither on summer eves to listen to the madrigals when all the dim night world was dewy with the scent of roses.

See there, yet again,—through the gloaming, goes a white-froaked Dominican, with bent head and meditative eyes; of all the many thousand monks in Florence, he is “Il Frate” to the people. When he scourges himself in the crypt, and sees the pictures and the sculptures feed the flames, does he ever sigh for that old bright vine-hung bottega where he woke with the sunrise and worked till the evening bells, when he was only Baccio della Porta, the painter, dwelling just outside the gate here, where the cypresses guard the entrance of that glad green country whose smiling beauty gained it its gentle name of Verzaja even in the dry grim records of the city’s rolls?

Down the old street of the Augustines there comes a group of merry-makers fresh from the laughter and the wine-cups of the supper at the tavern by the Tower of the Amidei away by the Jewellers’ Bridge. They loiter in the moonlight to hearken to the sweet singing of the street-choristers, and note with painters’ eyes one beautiful, gentle, golden curled youth, to whom many a white hand undoes a casement, or lets drop a lovescroll tied with a tress of hair. They are men who are called Michelangiolo, and Cellini, and Bugiardini, and Albertinelli, and Manzuolini.

A little while, and Michelangiolo paces the stones alone, with his cloak wrapped about him and his hand ready to his sword-hilt, and his heart heavy for the fate of free Florence; for the bell of the people has long rung a stormo, and his cannon bristle and his bastions rise on the old monastic heights, and the fire has burnt black the shady gardens of Gicciardini, and above them, on the hills where Corsini built the cloisters for the Augustines to dwell in all their days in peace, there the fierce Spaniards are crying, "Lady Fiorenza, bring out your brocades, and we will measure them at the pike's length;" and there, too, floats that banner which has been for ever the malediction of Italy, on whose yellow folds there is blazoned black,

"l'Aquila grifagna
Che per più divorar due becchi porta;"

In the morning when the birds are singing in the old grey gardens behind the old grey palaces, and the walls lean together and frown against the sun, you, thinking of all these who have trodden the stones before you, shall stray slowly down the Via Maggio—the Street of the Maytime—the street named from the sweet season of the lilies and the lovers in the old amorous days of free Florence, when, with the first morning of May, the youths of the city went forth from the gates by the sunrise, and came back with the spoils of the woods and the fields to the sound of the lute and the viol, and at every grated casement hung up the branch of hawthorn, and the knot of ribbon, and the scroll of love words, each wooer for his own innamorata, so that under the green wreath of leaf and blossom the dark iron-bound walls looked

like the helmet and hauberk of Rinaldo flower-decked by the rose trails of Armida on the amorous banks of Orontes. And so musing, you shall pass out by the gates and feel the sweet winds blowing fresh again over the vine-lands of the Vald'ema, and you shall meet a woman carrying white roses with her to lay upon some tomb upon the hill there; and you shall think of the night feast of Pardon, when all Florence was wont to flock up hither under the stars to wash their souls clear before the fall of Pentecost; and so quiet of heart, and yet glad for the beauty of dead days, and of the living summer time, you will go up and up higher and higher till you reach the stillness of the olive-woods upon Arçetri.

Shall you be dull and weary in dark Oltrarno—now?

Nay, not if you have eyes that see, and ears that hear.

But the world is full of deaf and blind.

CHAPTER II.

At Boccaccio's Window.

I WAS both blind and deaf in that horrible time.

I think a flower, when they break it off its stalk and throw it down to sicken in the sun, must feel as I did all those weeks and months. Only the flower faints and dies, and is so far at peace; but I lived on, though all my youth, and heart, and soul, and hope were killed in me.

It seems so long ago; so very, very long ago; and yet at times near, as though it were only yesterday,

that I saw the people sweep past the great gaunt pallor of the Santa Croce, his face in their midst within the reddening light of dawn. The vast yawning dark—the woman with her jewels at her prayers—the gleam of the silver at the altars—the sweet shrill voices of the singing children—the rush of the crowd—the ghostly gleam of day—how near they all are, and yet so far. Sometimes I fancy they were only dreams—dreams, too, all that one glad summer year of wandering—and then I go slowly over the links that bind me to the time, as other women in their pain tell beads.

The links are clear enough, but I can say no prayer to them. My beads are full of thorns, and hurt me—still.

There must be good people, though one doubts it so. A woman saw me fall thrice on the stones before the Florentine Pantheon, and had me borne upstairs to her little chamber before the Misericordia bell could boom for me. She was an old woman, and quite poor; she got her living darning the silken hose of danciers and of ladies; she lived in that little crooked passage-way under the shadow of the Pitti, where old Toscanelli dreamed his way across the unknown waters to the unknown land, and gay Boccaccio, with his cynical fine smile, loitered to see the dames of Florence pass in their gold-fringed litters and their gemmed zibellinè to the feasts in the Palaces of Bardi and Frescobaldi.

She was a little brown, crisp, clean woman, seventy years old; she had a wide, bare, stone chamber under the unceiled roof; all day long she darned at the stockings, looking now and then out of the window,

as Boccaccio had done before her, but seeing no gold-fringed litters and jewelled dames, but only the weary mules, and the pushing people, and the pedlar's stall of cloth and linen, and the cobbler at his work over the way.

In that barren chamber I lay sick unto death for weeks, talking in so strange a confusion of cities and villages and flowers and singing birds, and the notes of lutes and the shine of the moon on the maize fields, that none who heard could make sense of the medley. There she kept me; there I slowly got my hold again on life as youth will even when most reluctantly; there I recovered in a dull, hopeless, sullen, stupid way; and there the dreamy days would roll away with gleams of the beautiful rose-flecked sky just left to madden one above the frowning palace pile.

The old creature would sit in her garret window sewing on at the silken hose; there was delicate carving all about the window, and a great shield with a marquis's crown above; it had been a palace in the old days when the San Lorenzo men had set all Oltrarno ablaze from the Niccolò gate to the Frediano. There she would sit and sew; chirping to my dull deaf ears in her Tuscan; she had stories for all the stockings that used to lie in a great mixed heap in a rush basket—the needy duchessa's with the gay ballerina's.

“See!” she would say, holding one after another up to the strong light. “See! what a little atom that is—just worn in the ball of the foot with dancing,—a fairy might put it on, and for certain a lover has been glad to stroke it, many and many an hour when the dance was over and done with, and the fire-flies put

their lamps out ere the sun rose, and in the balcony where those little feet were, it was all so still—so still."

"And then again," she would go on, diving down for a stocking thrice the size, "a big one this, no beauty in it; broad as a pumpkin leaf and thick as any melon—worn in the toes—you know what that means. Pirouettes by the dozen on the Pagliano boards; standing strained on tip-toe as a Lotus Lily or a Queen of Night. No story in it that is pretty like the lover's to the little fairy feet. And yet, perhaps, you know, some poem after all; some homely thing sung to a baby's cradle and a shuttle's swing, in some weaver's bare garret where the meal-pot would be empty and the stove be empty too, if the young, fresh, brown mother did not run out into the cold and strip her kirtle and dress herself in clouds and flowers to dance for a silver coin before the gay theatre lights? Ay—who knows? A big, square, ugly pair of hose, 'no doubt, but worth the better darning maybe than those dainty ones of the pretty *marchesina's*, after all."

So she would chirp to herself, driving her long needle deftly all the day; a poet who could not read, but only feel, like many millions of her country people.

Pascarèl would have talked with her for the hour and found her histories for all the stockings tumbled in the rush basket on her feet. But I—her chirping made my heart more sick, my brain more dull, my life more desolate. I was thankless, so utterly and cruelly and unremorsefully thankless, as only very early youth can be.

For in later years we throb all over with so many wounds, that we have learned to value the hand that plucks a dockleaf for our nettle sting, though we know well no balm can heal the jagged rent in the breast that no man sees.

Old Giùdettà darned her hose under the sculptured shield, and trotted to and fro between the lattice and my bed of sacking in the corner where she had laid me, and prayed for me every chilly morning in the great white silence of the Sta. Spirito, and begged her own brass-framed red and blue picture of the Madonna to have a care for me, though I seemed but a sad little pagan to her, where I lay and sobbed and moaned wearily through all the sickly hours.

How good she must have been, a woman so old as that, and so poor that she sewed stockings from the first peep of the sun to the last flare of the oil-wick. Yes; she must have been good indeed. She died after one day of sickness only, a year later, so I heard; her needle in her old worn, tired hand, smiling, they say, and wondering if the Madonna would ever let her darn a little there in heaven for mere old remembrance sake.

I told them, when I heard that, to set her up the whitest, fairest cross that ever shimmered in the light above there under the cypresses on the dusky Miniato slopes. Cold gratitude, you say?—but am I worse than nations when I measure my debt by a stone's height and breadth?

There is nothing so ingrate as a great grief; and mine was bitterly thankless, utterly apathetic. I took what she did for me indifferently as a right; I had no thought of her; all the thought I had was with that

sweet dead hour when the vintage moon had shone above Fiesole.

She would sit and chirp all day in her sonorous Tuscan; she had darned stockings all her life, she said, drawing her threads so fine no one could tell where the silk once had gaped.

She was most good to me, and I most thankless.

She was very poor; but she pinched herself in her measure of oil and her handful of meal to tempt my sickening indifference with the rosy heart of some prickly southern fig, or fresh pomegranate. She was childless and cheery, and loved by her neighbours, and had no need of me: yet hardly could a mother have been more patient with my ingratitude and fierce despair than she was. I was so young, and friendless, and unhappy, it was plain to see. That touched her, and she kept me. Ah, you who say there is no honest fruit of love and grace beneath that sweet wide-opened sun-swept flower, of an Italian smile—how little way you see, and how you lie!

Did ever you hear of Signa Rosa? Nay—not you.

She lived forty years in widowhood on the sea-shore by Nizza; a small, slender, beautiful old woman, very beautiful, they say,—I never saw her, for she died in my babyhood, but I have heard this from many tongues,—well, she bound the peasant's coif about her head, and did her homely service daily for herself, and never stirred across her threshold except when early mass was ringing over the orange thickets; but her country folk sought her from far and near for consolation and for counsel; in her the dove's gentleness and serpent's wisdom were blended; peace-making was her office; and none sought her who did not

leave her simpler, purer, better for her words of solace; so she dwelt for near half a century, the sanctity of the cloister about her, yet in her the warmth of human sympathy, the sweetness of widowed fidelity, and the passion of maternal love; so she dwelt where the palms of the riviera rise against the blue sea skies, and when she died ten thousand Italians followed her to the grave, and to this day the country numbers her with its holiest names.

For Signa Rosa was the mother of Garibaldi.

Without such women, think you that Italy would ever have such sons?

Indifferent to, insensible of, anything that moved around me, I listened and answered with no sense of what I heard or said. I used to lie and watch the figure of Giùdettà, brown against the golden sunset lightened panes; and wonder feebly why I could not die—that was all.

It was the winter season of pleasure and pomp.

One morning lying there face downward on my mattress of grass, I heard gay, tumultuous shouts and bursts of music, and the shrill pipe of eager voices, and the sun was shining yellow and broad across the floor.

Another little old woman, a gossip of Giùdettà's, came and stood by me awhile; she had a new dark kirtle, and a scarlet ribbon in her white hair, and some brave silver rings in her ears.

"I wish you could get up and come, poverina," she said kindly. "You are so young to lie and die like a motherless kid there; and they are bringing in the Carnival, and it is good to see. I have never missed once for seventy-two years!"

I shivered and turned farther from her sight, and buried my face in darkness.

The familiar merry welcome name of the old Catholic king struck like a knife into my aching heart.

All the day long I lay there shrinking from the sun rays, and striving to hide from the sounds and the shouts of the streets. The chiming bells, the laughing voices, the furious fun, the blaring trumpets, all came in a dull echo across the river into the chamber where I lay; and I shuddered and cowered down as those do who, in the dead of night, believe that they behold the risen ghosts of their lost and buried loves.

Mercifully for me, Carnival reigned and rioted on the other side of Arno, and in the old still dusky quarter of the Silver Dove silence and solitude only had dominion as the people flocked across the bridges and left it to the coming of the chilly twilight.

Giudettà stayed with me, and sat at her work in the casement.

"We are always dull in old Oltrarno," she said.

I was thankful. I shivered where I lay, when on the nights of Dominica across the river from the arches by the Vecchio Bridge there floated to us the distant tumult of the Midnight Fairs.

The Carnival went by, and all the coolness of Quaresima, and the bright brevity of Pasquà, followed it, and in their turn passed by and dropped into the things that were.

I heard the shrill gala shouts and the clamour of the Berlingaccio; I heard the Lenten bells swing in monotonous measure from dawn to eve; I heard the joyous cries of the lovers and the children tossing

their Easter eggs into each other's breasts, or bearing home their sheaves of palm. I heard it all telling the passage of the feasts and seasons as chiming clocks ring away the dying hours. I heard it all sitting against the empty stone hearth, heart-sick, and weaving the threads to and fro, to and fro, to and fro.

For me, every one of those fasts and feasts had voice, and the dead days lived in them, as a dead child lives for its mother in the tones and the glance of every laughing yearling that creeps out to catch her black skirts in rosy fingers. She shudders from the tender touch;—so I shuddered from the sunny hours.

CHAPTER III.

By the Mouth of the Lion.

THE cold had gone; it was the balmy, cool, spring weather united with the golden Tuscan noons and the roseate Tuscan twilights that had welcomed me when I had first passed the gates of Florence. I had been three months with Giùdettà, and had not left my bed. I was a wan, shrunken, tired thing, with immense startled eyes and short clipped curls; few would have recognised in me the child that had wandered in the wake of the Arte through all the blossoms of the year from the bright crocus to the tremulous cyclamen.

One day I was lying listless and feeble in my dark room, where no ray of light could come from the narrow grated casement, when suddenly there arose upon the noonday quiet a rush of many feet, and a wide echo of deep voices that seemed to rend asunder the old walls.

She sitting by the window, thrust her stocking off her arm, and leaned as far out as the grating would allow her; a little, bent, eager, curious figure with the glow of the noon light catching the silver rings in her ears.

"Che, che!" she cried. "What a clamour and clatter,—all the town is out,—they have those free three-coloured flags, too, that the lads got shot so often for, years ago, and that the priests say will always bring on us poison in the wells and pestilence. There is little Tista, the baker's son, amongst them; he is always a bit of tinder. Ah, Tista, Tista, tell me what it is all about. Are the people mad?—or is Giotto's gold cap put atop the campanile?—or is the Pope come? Che, che! Stop a bit, Tista, and say a word, boy."

There was a shrill boy's voice, clear as a silver trumpet upon Easter day, that pierced above the din and joyous uproar and came through the darkness of the chamber to me.

"It is Pascarel set free of the Bargello, and we make high holiday. Dress your casement, good mother, and at sunset bring a light there, or we will break it sure to-night."

I sprang from my bed—I whose wasted, fever-stricken limbs for three long months had never known me upright,—I bruised my bare arms and my hollow cheek against the iron grating; I beat my aching breast against the bars like any fresh caged bird. But all I saw was the gay glad tumult of the crowd heaving and gathering under the broad sunshine, with the three colours of free Italy tossing high against the scarlet cross of Florence. Then, too weak to stand, my feet

gave way beneath me, my hands loosed their hold upon the stancheons, the bright multitude in the narrow, dusky street was blotted into utter darkness; I fell moaning and bruised upon the garret floor.

At night she hung her light within her window, as Tista, the baker's son, had bidden her; and went quietly herself to vespers, as was her wont. Ever since I had heard the one name ring down the street, I had leaned there, pressed against the grating, to watch the return of the people through Oltrarno.

I loved him so—dear Heaven! and yet almost I hated him. He had deceived me! He had deceived me!

This was the iron in my soul. It is an error so common! Men lie to women out of mistaken tenderness or ill-judged compassion, or that curious fear of recrimination from which the highest courage is not exempt. A man deceives a woman with untruth, not because he is base, but because he fears to hurt her with the truth; fears her reproaches, fears a painful scene; and even when she is quite worthless, is reluctant to wound her weakness. It is an error so common! But it is an error fatal always.

Night fell quiet; the oil-lamp glimmered in the casement. I forgot the light it shed upon my face, but crouched there, watching with wide beaming eyes the coming of the crowd.

The eighth hour echoed from the Vecchio as there rolled in on the silence—the deep sea-like sound of a rejoicing people. The tramp of many feet came distinctly over the bridges. The swell of song vibrated against the massive walls.

Strained against the grating, I watched and listened. Then, after a little space, they poured through

the narrow passage by the Lion's Mouth, they came, the people of Oltrarno—artizans, painters, mosaic-sellers, wood-cutters, cobblers, traders, all in a confused moonlight struggle, with banners above them and shouts rising from them; and in their midst my darling, with the white moonlight on his dark straight poetic brows and on his dreamful eyes.

Breathless I pressed against the iron bars—breathless I gazed, as only any creature can who, for months of silence and of absence has never once looked upon the face it loves.

I forgot the light shed on me—he looking up at the eager people that filled every illumined casement, saw me where I leaned, and with one great cry, like the cry of a drowning man, he sprang down from the height on which they bore him aloft upon their shoulders, and forced his way up the ink-black slope of the steep stairs, and thrust his foot against the fastened door, and broke into the room.

Then with a great cry he caught me in his arms, and held me close there in the great darkness, as a man will hold some dear thing dead. How many moments went I know not; as there are years in which one does not live a moment, so there are moments, I think, in which one lives a lifetime.

The moonlight went whirling by; the darkling shadows swam round me like eddying waters; the floors trembled; then my eyes closed beneath his kisses, my sense grew faint, the world was dark—all dark. But it was the sweet, hot darkness of a summer night; and even then I know I prayed, so far as I could pray, that I might die in it.

The trance of passion passed.

After a while, whether the time was short or long I cannot tell, the cloud upon my senses seemed suddenly to lift; the deathlike trance of passion passed. I lifted my head, and strained myself backward from his hold, and shivered where I stood.

For I remembered.

He, with a quick vague fear awakening in his eyes, held me against him.

"Why look at me like that?" he cried, and then was still.

What I answered I cannot tell. All madness of reproach that ever any tongue could frame, I know left my own lips in that blind, cruel hour. All excuse for him and all goodness in him I forgot: ah, God forgive me, I forgot! He had deceived me; that was all I knew or cared to know.

I had longed for his touch, his look, his word, as prisoners for liberty, as dying youths for life; and yet, now that he was there, all the pride in me flamed afresh, and burned up love. All that I poured on him were hot upbraiding, and broken bitter scorn.

"You shall not touch me, you shall not touch me!" I cried to him, wrenching myself from his hold as we stood there, in the paleness of the moonlight, with the shouting of the baffled and impatient crew filling the air with its strange tumult; in the noise, in the flashing light, in the sudden passion of joy and terror, of love and hate, my brain was gone. I had only this one memory left, and with it the instinct to wither him with his shame.

I do not know either what he said in answer. I knew he kneeled there in the moonshine, kissing my hands, my dress, my feet, pouring out to me in all

the eager fervid eloquence of his nature the rapture, the woe, the wonder, the sorrow, the shame, and the remorse that turn by turn had their sway over him.

"Loved her!" he cried, as I flung the word back on him again and again and again in the fury of my solitary instinct. "Loved her! Oh, God! do not profane the word—oh, child! how should you know? Love? What has love to do with the mindless follies and the soulless vagaries of men? One catches the rotten pear that falls with golden skin across one's summer path; but what fruit of thought, what flower of fancy, what fragrance of heart or soul can there be there? Another passer-by had had it, coming first. Oh, gioja mia! oh, anima mia! listen, listen, listen, and believe! If you love me, be jealous as you will of the wind that touches me, of the sun that shines on me, of the air I breathe, or of the earth I tread, but never be jealous of a soulless love. There is no dead thing in its cold corruption that a man can ever loathe as he loathes that!"

I shut my ears to the sweet pleading of his heart. I wrenched my hands from him. I struggled from his arms.

"Ah! so you say, ah! so you say," I said to him. "But why should I believe you? You deceived me once!"

His head bowed itself down upon my feet; he was silent a moment, then he raised his face quite bloodless as the dead are in the chill moonrays.

"Oh, my darling! I know, I know!" he murmured softly. "But be gentle, have patience; what else then could I do? I was frank with you—as frank as I could be; not to lay evil bare beneath your guileless

eyes. I told you from the first we were unfit for you; only you pleaded so to stay, and my heart pleaded for you. You were so young, so helpless, so utterly lonely in your defenceless ignorance; and I tried to get better shelter for you, and I failed. And you were happy, and you heard no harm. It was a shame to love you, and let one's-self be loved. Ah, yes! I know, but it was all so natural, so innocent, so unforeseen; ah, light of my eyes! I sinned to you, indeed. But all the while I strove so hard to do my duty to you,—such poor and feeble duty as I could. Can you not forgive me that I erred in weakness?"

Almost I yielded as I heard; the crowd, astonished and impatient, surged with loud outcry through the narrow street below, but all that I had ears for was that sweet, sonorous, passionate voice that had made its music for me in the old dead days in the moonlightened fields, whilst the maize was all ablaze with the love fires of the lucciolei. Almost I yielded: all the life in me was yearning for his life; for the softness of silent kisses; for the warmth of folded hands, for the gladness of summer hours spent side by side in the ilex shadow, for the passion and the peace of mutual love that smiles at the sun, and knows that heaven holds no fairer joys than those which are its own, at the mere magic of a single touch!

Almost I yielded, held there by his close-clasped arms, his face looking upward as he kneeled there where the moonrays fell.

A moment—a word—and it was mine again; mine for evermore; mine a thousandfold more strong in sweetness, and more sweet in strength than I had known it whilst the wild libeccio blew the fragrance

from the trampled grasses and the trodden grapes and the tossing roses on the hillside on the night of the saints beneath Fiesole. A moment, and it was mine. And I, oh fool! oh poor, vain, proud, half-hearted little fool! I shut my heart to him, and shuddered in scorn from the deep dreamful delight that stole upon me like a trance.

Should the lips that had touched hers seek mine again? should the man who could sink to that baseness of a sensual bondage kneel at my feet and pray to me for union of my soul with his?

I dared not trust myself to look on him; I flung my head back, and strained against the all-compelling force of his embrace.

"You talk—you talk—you talk—as poets do!" I cried to him, in my vain, bitter, childish rage. "It is your art, your trade! You string the terza rima for a brazierfull of contadini's pence—any night they ask you—at a village fair. A poet—you, who for three years could find companionship in such as she; who, for all those seasons could stay unshamed and show yourself upon your stage beside her like your own dancing dog beside its chained and collared mate! I will not hear you—no! It is too late. Go to her—go! Since once you found your level with her, keep it. It is too late, I say:—words?—oh, yes! They are your art; I know. You can make men weep, and laugh at them in your sleeve. You can make children laugh; and you all the while as weary and sad as death. That is your trade, to lie. A little lie or two—one more or less—what does it signify? You dupe a woman—what of that? It is your art to fool the world with the sham artifice of every counterfeit emo-

tion. Practise on every fool that loves you—her or me, or any other—what does it matter? you are still upon your stage!”

He loosed his arms from round me and rose slowly, staggering a little in the dusky shimmer of the shadows and the moonbeams. There was a look upon his face that I had never seen there. God forgive me! So, I think, must a man surely look who gets his death-blow straight through flesh and bone, and lives a second's space to look death in the face.

“You say that—you?” he murmured; and then was still, resting his eyes upon my own in an unspoken reproach, that pierced me like a knife thrust through my heart.

“Yes, I say it—I—why not?” I cried to him, stung by remorse at the pain I dealt, and yet driven on by what I deemed my wrongs. “Have I not seen you, heard you, watched you a hundred times if once, playing at any passion that you would? Of course it was so easy to cheat me, a child that trusted you, and took your every word as a fixed law of God's! From first to last you know that you deceived me; from the day you gave me the gold florins, to the night you said you loved me. If you had loved me, would you have let me live in that paradise of falsehoods for one single hour? Would you not rather have sought for me my father and my kindred? I come of a great race; I told you so; somewhere in the world live people who would own and shelter me, people who would lift me up into some light of fair repute and of known dignity. If you had loved me, that is the thing you would have done; I being too young, and poor, and simple, and ignorant to be ever

able to do it for myself: you boast of honour; you say you are the last of a once mighty line, though only now a wandering player; if it were so, if you were worthy of the loyalty and love those people in the streets give to you for their country's sake, would you have let your feet rest or your eyes close until you should have given me some firm, straight place in life, some hold upon my kith and kin, some knowledge of my heritage? For me it is impossible; but for you to have done that, how easy! *Then*, indeed, I might have said you loved me."

He was quite quiet as he listened. Men are so generous—oh, heaven, yes, how generous—for only think how rare it is that ever a man will strike a woman? And they, themselves, daily, hourly, incessantly stung, and bit, and galled, and chained by scorpion words and adder kisses! Men are so generous; he was so. He never once lifted up his voice and said, as he might have said so justly: "And what title had I to serve and save you? Why did I not leave you as I found you, a beggar in the ilex wood that day?"

He was quite quiet. All the glow and eagerness and fervour of passion had died off his face; it grew cold, and colourless, and still, with the impenetrable stillness of an Italian face that masks all pain.

"No doubt you are right," he said, gravely. "It would have been better had I done so. But,—you doubt I loved you,—I?"

In lieu of such a gentle word as that, why did he not throw me down under his feet, and cast on me his goodness and his grace, his tender thoughtfulness and patient care of me, like coals of fire on my vain,

foolish cruel head? If men set their heel more often on what is weak and worthless, I think women might be better than they are; God knows.

All my old perfect love for him, all my old perfect faith in him, welled up in my faint heart and almost broke the forces of my bitter vanity and greed. Almost, but not quite; for what I knew, might he not have come to me fresh that very night from the babbling lips and the brown hands of his old toy?

I was passionate with woman's passion; I was cruel with children's cruelty.

"Why should I believe you?" I cried to him. "You have let me believe a lie—once!"

His face flushed crimson, then grew very pale under its olive darkness. I think he looked as a dead man must do. He shrank a little as though one had struck him a blow, a blow that he could not return.

"You have a right to reproach me as you will," he said very gently. "And how should you know, how should you know?"

A heavy sigh ran through the words and made them barely audible. He looked at me very long, very wistfully, with no passion in his eyes, only a despair, that was so great that it chilled me into speechless terror. For it was so unlike himself, or at least I thought so in my ignorance. He paused a moment, looking so.

A convulsion of longing seized me to throw myself into his arms and cling to him for ever, for ever, for ever, forgetting all and all forgiving. But I was a child; I was fierce, I was ignorant, I was wayward, and I had been wounded in the one sweet, sacred, perfect faith of my short life. I stood there silent and

unyielding; my burning eyes were tearless, my scornful mouth was mute.

There must have been that in my attitude, or in my look, or in my silence, that stung him like some insult, for the blood flashed back into his face, and he raised himself with his old dauntless and grand gesture.

"Even *you* shall not say that twice," he murmured. "I will serve you in other ways, God willing, but you shall not see my face again. Farewell."

Before I had measured the force of what he had said he had gone; turned away and passed from sight.

A single step, a single cry would have called him back. But I stood motionless and silent still; and let him go: O God!

The clamorous people thronging the staircase and the stairs, filled the night with their loud outcries. I called him back, but all in vain; my voice was drowned in the tumult as a child's death-cry in a storm at sea.

CHAPTER IV.

Dead Roses.

THIS was in the week that followed upon Pasqua.

The summer months went by, and I neither counted them nor knew what they were bringing.

The days and nights passed by in an agony, at times fierce and at others dull, but always agony like that of a gunshot wound which burns like a flame one hour and aches like a bruise another.

The face of Pascarel I never saw; and once when

little Tista went by and Giùdettà asked him what was become of the wild fellow for whom he had made her burn her lamp all night, Tista called up to her sadly, "He is out of the city, mother; and we are flat as ditch water—all of us."

I never stirred out;—never once.

I thought that it would make me mad to see the sun shine upon his Florence—and I did not fear death, but I feared madness.

I had seen it once, in a beautiful dark woman in old Ferrara, whose lover had been swept down in the winter floods and drowned before her eyes, and she was forever walking to and fro along the water's edge and calling to it to give up her 'Dino; I had seen her pacing there crying forever the one name when the sun was up, as when the moon was high; she was sacred in Ferrara; the rudest ruffian of the streets would not have touched dead 'Dino's "Pazza." And sometimes I feared—in the hush of the night I often feared—that I should be just like her. For all I said, ever, and ever, and ever, was just one name, as she did,—only I said it in my heart,—and no one heard.

I never stirred out—as I say.

Often Giùdettà strove to take me with her to Sta. Spirito, and draw me out to see the humour of the streets; but week by week, and month by month dragged on, and I stayed there by the cold hearth and saw the hand's breadth of blue sky burn above the palace roof, and prayed—as far as I ever prayed—to have an end made to my pain in death.

But death, like other gifts, comes not for our asking.

One morning, as I lay there upon my bed, old

Giùdettà drew her stocking off her arm, put down her spectacles, and looked at me with her brown Tuscan eyes.

"Do you know that it is the Ascension week, and we are now in June?" she asked me suddenly.

I shook my head wearily; what to me was the flight of time, or the advent of summer?

"I have seen sixty-eight summers come and go," she said, after a pause.

I did not answer.

"Sixty-eight summers," she said again. "There was a time with me when the sight of the sun and the smell of the flowers made me sick—soul and body—as you are."

I heard her, but her words were nothing to me. I should not have heeded in these days, I think, the roar of flames, or thunders of a flood.

"Listen to me a little," said Giùdettà, and she turned her round on her oaken stool and sat with the sun touching the grated panes above her old white head. She was a little tender old soul, forever chirping on her lonely hearth like a little brown grillo, and very good and patient with me, and I all the while brutally thankless. "Listen a little. You young things think no one was ever born before you; it seems so new to you, all you suffer. You are wrong. Listen. When I was fourteen I was a dancer at the opera-house here;—like these girls I mend for, only I had prettier feet than they. I was a simple, honest, happy thing; dancing for my bread and my mother's, and thinking no harm, and doing none. I danced a couple of years; heart whole and content, though I never got in the front, or made over half a paul a-night.

People all said I was pretty. Perhaps I was, as a robin is. One Carnival night, as I ran home in the snow, I slipped and fell down on Carraria bridge; it was very bad in those days. A passer-by picked me up and carried me home, for I was light of weight, and had sprained my foot, so I could not stand. There was no dancing for me for weeks. He came to see how it fared with me; came often; he was a nobleman, and a soldier; a Francese, too. Before the vines were in flower we had got to love one another. Some people shook their heads at me, but that did not matter; no man had touched so much as my hand till he kissed it. That year—well, I thank the good God for it. One can live on a year. He would have given me all manner of great and rich things. But I said, 'No, no, no; if I take a paul of yours, what shall I be better than the rest?' And all he ever gave me was a few knots of roses. I have got them. They will be put in my coffin with me. When the year was lived out,—I thank the dear God for that year,—there were war and trouble, and that great one they called Napoleone was in his death-struggle, so they talked. Then my love came to me and said, 'See, he was my chief, and I owe him much, and I cannot let him fall and I not there. You are the light of my eyes, Giùdetta, but what can I do when my honour speaks?' I tried all I could to speak to him. For honour—that sounds so hard to us women. We do not see it; and it is always set against us; and we have no share with it; and we hate it, I think. But all I could do did not stir him. 'If I come not back in a year's space I am dead in battle,' he said. Then he kissed me for the last time and went. Napoleone was ruined

and put in chains; that they said; but he—he never came back—not at that year's end, nor any other's. And never a word have I had. It is near fifty years now. Never a word—dear God. People made a mock of me, and cried, 'A fine lover!—he was only tired, and fooled thee!' But I never answered them back. I knew he was dead, or he would have come. What use was it to have loved him if one had not such little faith as that?"

Her voice shook a moment, and dropped into silence; it was all still in the chamber; the gold sunbeams shone through the gratings and cast an aureole on her old bent head.

After awhile, she took up her tale again.

"There were times I was mad, and was nigh throwing my body in the river, and making an end, but I thought the good God would not let me meet him in Paradise if I did that. So I went on and on, and bore with my life. I never danced again—no, no,—it was not for others to look on what he had used to call fair. I took to mending the magliè and the hose, as I do now, just getting bread; that was all. My poor old mother lived a long while. She used to fret herself, and curse me. I was good to look at, and there were many men of our quarter here wanted me—all in marriage and honesty. And my mother could not see why I shook them off 'all for a bad man, and a dead one, or as good as dead,' she would say—she did not know. She lived a long while here;—yes, here;—I was born in this room. I shall die in it. He used to want me to change to some fine villa up in the orchards and gardens; but I always said no;—if I had taken an ounce of silver from him, I should

have felt he had bought my kisses. I only took the roses,—I have them safe,—they will put them in my coffin with me. So many, many, many years I used to look out at this window to watch for him coming down the street, as he used to do, just at nightfall, as the moon came up over the old palace there. I go and look still—still—and I always think I shall see him just the same, just as young and light of foot as he was then. And it is fifty years ago—fifty years this Carnival.”

She was silent; the sunbeams fell through the grating on to the stone floor. She drew her stocking on her arm again, and worked on and on, on and on.

I shivered where I lay.

Fifty years! and always alone thus!

My life looked ghastly to me, seen by the light of this corpse candle that shone over these buried lives.

Should I live to be as old—always alone—always alone—live to tell my tale calmly, sitting in the evening light?

If I had had strength, I think, in that moment's agony, I should have yielded to the temptation that had in her youth beset Giudetta, and have gone out into the streets, and flung myself into the full flood of the mountain-shed Arno water.

Swift death! fierce death! how fair and pitiful it looked beside these fifty lonely years passed in poverty and pain under the strong summer suns and all the driving winter blasts!

“And did you never doubt him—never doubt that he lived and was faithless to you?” I asked her, roused

out of my apathy and isolation into a faint passing sense of some human interest.

She looked at me with eyes a little angered and more surprised, and paused in her work, the stocking on her arm.

"Doubt him! But, bambina mia, you have not understood. I had loved him and belonged to him; how could I ever doubt him—after that?"

The answer burnt me with a hot, sharp shame.

She was an old ignorant woman—one of the very poor; she could not read or write; she had no knowledge of any sort; she had a child's eagerness for seeing feasts and pastimes; she would gossip by the hour with the people in the street about any passing trifle of the town; she was a little homely, harmless, hard-working body, who went to pray in great white Santo Spirito in a dumb, dog-like, wistful, pagan sort of faith; she was the gossip of the washerwoman over the way, and the crony of the cobbler at his stall in the road below; she was only old Giùdetta, the mender of the dancers' magliè; and yet, shut up, unseen in the rude, wrinkled, weather-worn rind of her rough life, there was hidden the pure white heart of this noble and deathless faith!

Beside her I seemed in my own sight to fall away worthless and rootless—with neither love nor faith.

This was such love as he had dreamed of, there on the star tower, in the days of spring—the love that sees as God sees, and, has pardon and pity, wide as the width of heaven.

It had not been in me; young, with the years Love loves, and dreaming with glad eyes against the sun, and fleet feet, light as a blown leaf upon a world of

flowers. It was in her, poor, old, and utterly alone;—whose solitary hope on earth was that a dead rose should lie with her in her grave:—a rose dead fifty summers.

CHAPTER V.

Under the White Lion.

GIUDETТА found time betwixt the mending of the magliè to do many a little helpful act for her poor brethren and neighbours. She was always moving about at such times, as the hose she had to mend were not so many that they occupied all her time from sunrise on to midnight. But one August day, going down the seventy odd stairs of the old house she dwelt in, she slipped and twisted her foot under the brass pail that she was carrying for water to the well below.

She was a helpful, stout-hearted soul, and bore it well, and contrived to do for herself and me, and even to make the little frugal meals all the same. But she could not move beyond the church to which she went nightly at vespers; and her neighbour's child had to run hither and thither over the town to fetch and carry home the stockings that were her only source of income.

I should have done this, no doubt; but I was too deeply sunk in the apathy of pain to notice any duty. Nevertheless, one day, when the little lad was later in than usual, she so begged of me to take homeward some magliè, without which the poor dancer waiting for them would be unable to make her appearance at the summer theatre that night, that a vague sense of

the shamefulness of my own absorption stirred in me; and, the hour being close on evening-time, and the streets already dusk, I wrapped myself closely in an old dark-hooded cloak of hers, and for the first time in six months and more, went out into the air.

It made me stagger and feel sick.

The owner of the *magliè* lived beyond the Frediano Gate. The streets seemed all in a tangle of strange unknown curves to me—I, who had known the city, as a child his father's garden-ways, was adrift in it as in a foreign desert place. There was the red evening light everywhere, burning on the black shadows and the grey housewalls. Bells were beginning to toll for vespers. There was the scent of orchards from great mounds of ripe and rotting fruits. There was a loud gay chatter of voices and hurry of feet everywhere. A girl, about my years, leaned from a casement, and threw down a knot of carnations, and pouted, and shook her head ruefully at a young man standing below in a grey shirt and a scarlet cap.

"No chance of a stroll to-night, Agnolo;—mother will not let me stir from the *treccià*."

She thought it such a hard fate, leaning there, tied to her task of straw-plaiting, with her lover in the street below, unable to get out in the cool summer night, to stray into the woods, and see the *luciolè* lighten, and count the nobles' carriages in the wide, moonlit *piazzone*. She thought it such a hard fate, only able to toss down the carnations—Oh God! she did not dream how hungrily I below there envied her the shelter and the tyranny against which she thus rebelled.

Out by the Frediano Gate there was more light.

The after-glow came in full from the west, across the valdigrève. The cypresses of Oliveto were standing out against a wonderful sky; rose-purple, like the heart of a dahlia flower. The Strozzi lion couched white amongst the hanging woods. Along the road that wound at their base there were some contadini going homewards to the outlying villages.

One of these came towards me on a black mule. She was a little round red-and-brown figure; her panniers were full of market merchandise; before her strutted slowly a flock of young turkeys; she held a long switch, with which she struck at them; the old mule hobbled slowly in their wake; the grey plumes of the birds spread fanlike over the dust of the highway, as they rose and rustled in their wrath.

"Our Lady grant me patience, oh you diavolini!" cried the shrill, swift voice of the market-woman. "The sun is down, and, surely as one lives, you will all go to roost in the hedges—you always do;—just wherever you find yourselves, like the stupid boobies of birds that you are! And what can one do with you, you wretched simpletons?—sit and watch you in the hedge oneself all night, or else not a wing feather of you will there be to be seen in the morning! Such thieves as they all are in this city. That is what comes of buying you of that Pratoese by the barracks. If ever I buy poultry in the street again, may all my eggs be addled! And go to roost you *will*;—and we all these kilometres off home: you must have the tempers of a herd of gipsies in you, you nasty beasts, or you would never squat in any hedge like that, instead of waiting to get to proper perches like good God-fearing fowls——"

The shrill, scolding tones dropped suddenly; then a little frightened shriek broke the silence; her switch fell in the dust, her bridle on the mule's neck. In the warm ruddy light, under the dusky wood, amidst the grey fluttering feathers of the birds, the little round, rosy face of Brunóttá looked down into mine, blanching with sudden fear and wonder. Her hands sought the ring of amber beads about her throat, and her lips began to mutter prayers.

Perhaps I looked the ghost of my dead self to her, there, in the shadows and the warmth, perhaps; —I was so changed. And the long, dusky folds of the cloak covered my shape loosely from head to foot, and all she saw were my wide opened, feverish-startled eyes. I did not move. I sat on the stones, and looked up at her. I felt no wonder, no surprise, no passion of any kind; only a dreary desolate disgust and sickliness of great humiliation. He had loved her—this little shrill, scolding, petulant, coarse fool, striking at her turkeys with her switch—that was all I thought of: what better did I know?

The birds fluttered to right and left of her; the mule stood still; the other people had gone on round the bend of the wall; it was quite quiet; there was only the sound of a fisher's feet wading in the river below the bridge.

"Is it you?—is it you, indeed, donzella?" she murmured, timorously, her hands clasping and counting the beads all the while. "I thought you were dead; I always thought so. You look dead now; only your eyes burn. Are you angry? Are you very angry still? Oh, holy Gesù! how you frighten me!"

I made her no answer.

I gazed at her in a sort of dreamy contemplation, in which my disgust of her was lost in deeper scorn for him and for myself. This was the thing that had shared his heart with me; this was the toy that he had dallied with ere he had turned to play in my turn with me! So I thought, poor little, weak, faithless, ignorant soul that I was, knowing nothing of the follies and fancies of men, knowing nothing of how their passion floats over an ocean of froth, that it skims curlew-like till it dives for its one pearl of price in the depths that the storm stirs and opens.

"I was sorry as soon as I had done it," she began to whimper. "But who was to know he was in the Bargello? And who could tell that you would tear away and kill yourself like that? You were handsome, and you said you were illustrious. I thought all would go well with you. And the very next day I went and vowed a necklace to the Virgin, and I gave it, too; a beautiful thing, all real silver, with a moonstone, that that big black Dominic hung round me all for love—he swore it was his mother's; but I believe he pilfered it. Anyway, handsome it was, and the Madonna had it, and she ought to have had a care of you. But if you are not dead, you must be very, very poor—*are* you poor? Will you not say a word? Look you; now it is all over, I am not one that bears ill-will. I would give you a bed and a bit and drop—yes, I would; for Cocomero, he never saw any good looks in you; you were too thin for him; he likes a woman like a juicy apple, all round and rosy, just as I am. And if you like to come home with me, come. You shall be welcome. It is all over with Pascarèl and me, you know; and I have a tidy

little place out here, Signa way, and I always was a handy one with poultry——”

“All over!”

I echoed the words, not knowing what I did. What! a creature lived there, rosy, and young, and full of health, and quite content with all her days, who yet could say thus coolly all was over with her love, and could think and know that she would see his face and hear his voice no more, and yet, a moment earlier, had had no care but to drive her grey birds homeward ere the evening fell!

The sound of my voice banished her strange fears of me as an unreal thing. She ceased to cling against her mule, and stepped a little forward in the dust. The sun had set, it was growing quite dark under the shadow of Mount Olivè.

“It *is* you, then——donzella?” she cried aloud; “and you are here still? and in great straits, I think; for where are your yellow skirts, and your sunny hair, and your proud pretty toss of your head like a princess born? One would think you were a beggar, sitting on those stones there. Yes, it is all over with him and me. After you were gone I did not seem to care—somehow—I had been jealous,—and when he was in prison—it is as if a man were dead, you know. One gets to forget—quite. And I had always liked Coco: he was such a goodnatured simpleton, and just like a baby to manage, and as merry as a dog in a fair. So, when Pascarel found us out one day in Friuli and offered us this farm here, and said we might go before the priest and syndic and make all straight and right, as if one were a duchess, why, what could one do better? Coco was all for taking no-

thing—men are such fools; but I, I said, ‘never turn your back on a neat little podere, and a mule, and a poultry-house; when the Madonna sends such things, we should sin indeed not to take them.’ And, after all, dancing about in tinsel is merry and good enough in its way, but one cannot do it for ever, and it is well to have a roof over one’s head, and a fair name for fat fowls in the mercato; and, after all, say what you will, it is something to be a wedded wife,—wedded before syndic and all,—and if you only had seen the old mother’s face the first day I walked into the hovel in Casentino, and held my hand up to her with the yellow ring! It was worth anything just to spite her, for she had always sworn I should come to no good, but die in a ditch; and now she would give her ears for one of my turkeys to fat for Capo d’Anno.”

So her tongue ran, standing there in the white dust, and ending with a little gleesome laugh that showed her white teeth from end to end between the ruddy lips, like daisies set in poppies.

The dusky trees and purple skies, and all the deepening shadows in the bronze and gold of the night, swam round me in circles of darkness and light.

Brunotta slid herself from the back of the mule and stood leaning against the animal with one arm over his neck; a little ruddy figure, scarlet and brown, with black braids shining, and silver earrings glistening in the sunset, just as I had seen her first of all as the day had died and the crocus flowers had closed in the ilex woods to the sounds of the mandoline.

“Are you angry still?” she muttered, piteously. “As soon as I had told you, I was sorry—yes, I was. I am

not a bad little thing—only I was sick to see him crazed for you, and I wanted you to know—out of spite—yes, out of spite. But as soon as I had done it, I wished it undone. I hammered at the door to tell you so, but you would not listen. You went away through the window, and such a fuss as the padrona made about her rose trees, that were all dragged down and trampled, never was! But how you look! You must be dead, I think. And if you are dead, I will have a mass said for you—two or three masses, if only you will be quiet, and not walk at night!”

She began to sob as her wont was in any fear, or any extremity; her finger in her mouth like a sulking child, and her shoulders shaking against the broad neck of the patient mule.

I did not speak to her; I did not even rise and move away. I sat and looked at her vacantly; while, through the stupor of my thoughts, a shiver of the old scornful, bitter hate began to steal upon and stir in me.

“A wife!” I echoed, dully. “A wife! whose wife?”

I had only one thought. I had gathered no definite sense from her words.

She looked like a humbled chidden child who finds a gilded toy he boasted of is only rag and patchwork after all. Some sense and tinge of shame came on her; she shifted her feet in the dust. There was a sort of exultation and mortification struggling in her as she answered,—

“I am Coco’s wife; why not? He is just such a fool as he seems; and he dares not say his soul is his own if I look at him. That is the stuff one wants in a husband. And I always had been fond of him,—that I vow,—always. And when Pascarel was in prison,—it

was as if he were dead, you know. Of course I did not mean him to find out, but he overheard one day, and then he gave us the farm; and Coco, like a little blind barbaggiano as he is, went and told him I had driven you away. And then he was in such madness—such rage—the saints forgive him! I never saw the like. And we have never seen him since, except I passed him once on this very Signa road, and thought his eyes would have withered me up like a shrivelled leaf—he can look so, you know. But I bear no malice; no, not I; and if you want a roof over you, I will give it you, donzella—oh, yes, willingly; and we will let bygones be bygones, and be good friends, just as we used to be; and though you are useless enough, as I remember well, still there are things that you could do; and if you could not, I, for one, should never grudge you anything, and Coco,—whatsoever I tell him he thinks good, or says he does, which comes to the same thing; and you could see the house was safe while I come into the mercato, which one must do most days, or else lose credit with the buyers. You see I bear no malice—no, not I,—why should I? I have all I want. So, if you like to come—come;—and say no more about it.”

She put her hands out as she spoke—rough, brown, chubby, rosy palms—in token of fair faith and of all amity. She meant well—oh, heavens, yes! she meant well, poor little soulless, mindless, empty thing, that had no force to love or force to hate.

Why did I not strike her? Why did I not kill her?

I moved where I stood in the dust: a convulsive shudder of longing shook me to hurl her back into the

dust and strike her insult dumb upon her mouth as men may do with one another.

But some strain of an old proud race still ran in me and helped me to keep silence, and gave me force enough to rise quite quietly from the heap of stones on which I crouched, beggar-like as she had said, and look down into her pretty, cunning, timorous eyes, in which the red light was shining.

"You mean no harm," I said to her, "may things go well with you. But, if you are wise, do not let me ever see your face again."

And so I left her, and went back under the olive shadows to the city, and she stayed there, a little frightened ruddy figure, in the glory of the after-glow, and ere I had gone far I heard her calling to her birds that had nestled down by the wayside and folded their russet pinions for their rest, like feathered gipsies and hedgerow philosophers, as their kind have ever been.

The turkeys would roost in the road—that was her trouble; she had forgot all other.

Who will may see her any day sitting underneath her green umbrella, with her fowls clucking loud around her, hard by the old Strozzi pile, and not a stone's throw from what was once the bottega where Benvenuto shaped his Hercules on its field of lapis lazuli, and fashioned in gold, and bronze, and silver, his griffins and cherubs, his lilies and fauns, his wild acanthus wreaths, and his love-legends for his daggers' hilts.

Ah, dear foolish folk that weep for women! to one Gretchen on her prison-bed there are a million, Brunnötte at their market stalls.

Some pluck, like her, their speckled hens for a few

soldi; some pluck their golden geese in the great mercato of the world; but their end is all the same, and they are quite content.

I went on past the bridge, where men were wading with great cloud-like nets, and underneath the little church of Santa Maria, whose mellow bells were ringing across the silent water.

The sun had quite sunk; but there was a deep hot glare upon the sky that burnt the water red, the trees that stretch away towards the country were black, and from the full moon that hung in breathless purple skies, a lovely whiteness touched the river here and there, and gleamed upon the old pale walls of Signa, where she crouched to sleep under her feudal hills, scarce changed at all since the days of her many martyrdoms, when she was ever the first and surest mark for steel and torch from every foe who came across the mountains to violate the fruitful and serene loveliness of the olive-wreathed Verzaja.

I paused and looked back at all that evening calm—once—just once. I could still hear the voice of Brunóttá screaming to the birds beneath the monastery. I thought of one day, one golden day of the late summer, that we had loitered away in Signa; how we had strayed amongst the tossing millet, and wandered amidst the old monastic walls, and cut reed pipes from the canes by the Greve stream, and quenched our thirst with the sweet green figs as we watched the cloud shadows come and go on the shallow gold of the Arno water, where Hercules had cast down the rock that in later days served to save the fair jewel-hung throat of Fiorenza from the brutal blade of her ravisher Castuccio.

Then I groped my way senselessly through the Frediano Gate, the gate of the green country, as the old City called it.

It was night, though the red tinge was so slow to leave the west. The bells were tolling everywhere. People were passing through the doors of the churches to vespers.

Great, still, and white the vaulted basilica of the Dove looked like a palace of peace. There were a few dim lights at its east end. Scattered in its solitude half a dozen women, poor and old, kneeled in prayer, —dark bent forms against the marble pillars.

I lingered a moment on its steps, wishful to enter and pray likewise.

But shuddering, I looked and turned away—how can one pray when all one cares for on earth and in eternity is dead and gone?

I turned away and dragged my weary feet across the piazza where the moonlight was softly spreading, and under the shadow of the Guadagni Palace, where in the first night that I had laughed in the Wandering Arte the alabaster workers of Florence had borne away Pascarel upon their sturdy shoulders to the sound of their shouting and singing.

When I had groped my way by the Mouth of the Lion up to the garret of Giùdetta, her lamp was alight; there were swift eager voices in the chamber; the little old woman sitting on her settle gave a little thrilling cry of joy; a shadowy figure sprang to me and knelt at my feet, and kissed my poor dust-covered skirts.

"Ah, dear donzella!" cried the voice of Florio, "is that you? Is it indeed, you? How I sought you, all

northward—all on a false trail, and you in wretchedness like this the while! And such news, signorina mia—such news! The lord, your father, is a great noble, and a rich one too—this very Capo d'Anno only; such strange accidents, so many deaths, and he, whom none would own or look at, called at last to his fathers' place. Oh you never, never heard—it is a wonder-story for a child at Ceppò. And then to us—when we were all in the black north, taking crown and kingdom as it were—for it is all so great—then to us all of a sudden when I, amidst our grandeur, was still thinking and praying for you, though I had given up all hope—why, all of a sudden, comes to us, a week ago, a light witted, reckless, wandering scamp and playactor, who had made me split my sides many a night in his booth in years gone by in towns and villages. And he, all travel-stained and tired, with that wayward, capricious lordly fashion he has with him—for Pascarèl was always as proud in his ways as a prince, hedge-stroller though he has been from his boyhood up—he, I say, my darling signorina, forced his way to audience with your father, do all one would, and then and there told him where to find you; and what more passed between them the saints only know, but certainly high words of some sort; for the fellow when he came from your father swung through us all mute and fierce and with such a scorn on his face that I was like to strike him, only one knows he is so very apt to strike back. And a very little later milordo sent for me and bade me seek you out here, and I am come, and no empress, oh, my blessed little lady, shall ever have been greater than you shall be—if only it had pleased the Dominiddiò

to let dear dead Mariuccia see the day—and have you never a word to cast to your old faithful Florio; but can you only stare at one with those sad blind strange eyes that it half breaks the very heart in one's breast to see?"

I stood and listened: the flicker of the oil-lamp on my face, and on my ear the eager headlong torrent of my old friend's words.

Little by little—very slowly—the truth dawned on me.

My bidding had been done; and fortune came to me.

Then, in a passion of weeping, I wrenched myself from Florio's hands and cast myself face downwards on the bare stones of the floor.

Great? great?

Oh, God! what use was that?

Only to wander once again light of heart and of foot in the sweet Tuscan summer when the magnolias bloomed on the wide hillside and the lilies were blue in the vine-shadowed grasses—only to wander so once again with my hand held in his and his kiss on my cheek! What use were the greatness of kings to me?

I was left that night and day with old Giùdettà, and Florio went and came a hundred times, bringing me silks and satins, and jewels, and sweetmeats, and pretty painted toys, and all manner of rich dainty things, to be a surety to me of my new-won wealth; and he, good merry soul, full of joy and glory to the brim at the wondrous fortunes of the man to whom he had clung through every evil chance of penury and shame, he could not comprehend, but was sorely wounded because I would not look on any of the

treasures, but turned my face to the wall and kept crying: "Take me back to dear Mariuccia—take me back."

For it seemed to me, a brave glad child by nature, and therefore the more utterly unnerved and passion-beaten under my great pain, that the only real good that life could do me would be to take me back again to that old innocent despised home, where the lizards had sported under the broken Donatello, and the crack of the bean shells had struck sharp on the silence.

All that I could have any sense to hear was when he spoke of Pascarèl, and this he did often; because the story seemed strange to him.

"It is odd," said he, "that you have chanced on that wild-living fellow. Ah, dear donzella, I knew him so long long ago—when you were not born—a clever rascal, playing with French people who strolled through Savoy. They used to say, even then, that he might be a famous artist, and a rich one, if he chose.

"But he never chose. He is a vagabond at heart. That is certain. But I suppose he dealt with you as well as he could; for my lord, your father, let him go without rebuke, nay—seemed to be rebuked by him, if one might say so without disrespect.

"And of a surety he showed judgment and honour in never letting you be seen on his wandering stage. I suppose he did as well by you as he could, since you do not complain. But it was a terrible fate for a little illustrissima like you. And your father says that you are not to breathe one word of it.

"If you could have seen that fellow Pascarèllo .

sweeping through us all as light and as swift and as fierce as a panther, all dusty and travel-stained, and very pale, and with a strange light in his eyes, and calling aloud to see your father, with all haughtiness and insistance as though to be sure he were a prince himself, as some folks say his ancestors were in this Tuscany.

"Yes, to be sure it was strange: to see that clever rogue, last in his booth, in a little sea town on the Corniche making a hundred fisher people split their sides with laughter; and then next to find him a dozen years later calling out like a king to have speech with your father, all that way away in the northern islands—it is strange enough surely.

"And the people were so terrified at him because of his imperious way and his language, that was all unknown to them. But it was good of him, that I will always say, and I think only an Italian would have done it; to take all that pains and trouble to trace your father; and it was no slight work, such a change having come to our fortunes. A selfish man, dear donzella, would have been tempted to keep that pretty face of yours to deck his stage for him; and a mean one would have looked for some vast recompense. But Pascarèl—your father is a great noble now and has been a very bold person always, but I think he would no more have dared to offer a reward to Pascarèllo than a boy would have dared to face the Rè Satana.

"And it is very piteous to see you with your little white handsome face always shivering and weeping, though it is bright sunshine like this.

"Pascarèl said, I think, that he lost you when he

got caged in Bargello; and I suppose, though this good soul has done her best by you, still you have been half starved and very wretched.

"Never mind, carina; you will be so great now—so very, very great, and when we have got the roses back into your cheeks again you will have all the world at your feet. For even miserable as you look, my darling, you are very handsome still—beautiful, if one could get that haunted look out of your eyes."

So he would speak, and I would listen, my heart breaking as I heard. And I could see it all,—so well, so well,—in that dreary misty land that I had never trodden, in those towering castles of my father's race, that were set seawards against the clouds and billows of the vexed Gaelic water. I could see it all, the steel-hued waves, the grey bare country, the towering skies, the heavy pomp, the sullen northern crowds, and amidst it all the proud and wayward grace, the rapid voice, the lustrous eyes, the fearless eloquence of the Italian, dropped amidst them in utter unlikeness like a pomegranate flower shaken down on winter-withered bracken.

I could see it all, and broke my heart with vain-spent weeping at the thought of it.

In face of all my cruel words he had left his country and his people, and his free and simple life, and had gone northward in my service, maintaining himself doubtless by hard toil—for he was poor.

And I had driven him away, and said that I would never see his face again,—for what? For that poor little fickle traitorous thing who had screamed to her roosting birds there at sunset on the Signa road.

When Florio had left me that night in Giùdettà's

garret to sleep my last hours under its kindly shelter, for which I had been so thankless always, I sat and thought, and thought, and thought, till I was mad staring at the blue summer sky above the piled black roof of dark Oltrarno.

Giùdettà came and looked at me and put her hands gently on my bowed head.

"You are going to great people and great things, dear little lady," she said gently; "well, no doubt the world must be very fine for those who are rich and full of might in it. As for me I cannot tell, I have darned magliè here by the Bocca di Leone all my days. But I do not know rightly what is amiss with you. You have never spoken. But if you have ever loved one man do not ever try to love another. No. Not if it be ever so. So only can you ever live and die pure of heart and pure of body. That I know, though I have only mended magliè all my years in Florence."

Then she bade the Mother of God bless me, and left me in the twilight and went to her vespers in the Church of the Dove as her wont had ever been for seventy years at evening-tide, when there was no longer any light to draw together the silken threads.

I was alone, in the shadows that deepened and deepened till the brown front of the palace grew black and the streets had only little gleaming stars of flame where the people's oil lamps flickered.

When it was quite night there came a little knock at the door; a pretty barefooted child stood there with a great knot of roses.

She crossed the floor and brought them to me.

They were the same sweet snowy beautiful things

that had come to me at day-dawn after the Veglione. Round them was a roll of paper, and on it was written only: "Be happy. Farewell."

I crushed them to me as mothers crush their dying children in their arms, and my hot tears burned them like dropping fire.

This was the end? the end of all? Was the old sweet life of that Tuscan summer dead and gone then for evermore? Should never I see a blue lily bloom in its lowly grass nest without this sickness of soul upon me? Should never I smell the fresh scent of the vines and drink the magnolia breaths on a moonlight night, without this madness of memory that is worse than all death. Was this the end? the end of all?

BOOK VII.

THE FIELD OF FLOWERS.

CHAPTER I.

His Story.

THE villa stands amongst the hills.

It is four hundred years old. The broken sculptures on the terrace walls are all the shields of the great race that once reigned here. The chapel is changed into the chief reception room; it is long and lofty, and has a high vaulted ceiling, painted with frescoes of the Paradise; through its one vast window at the end there is a mass of silver shining; it is so beautiful and luminous and strangely white that nothing could compare with it except newly-fallen snow upon the Alps,—yet, go closer and look, it is only the plum trees in blossom there, beyond the wall, above the lily-filled grasses.

Out yonder in the rough simple gardens, where all that whiteness shines, you can see the towers of the city rising amongst the olives far below; nearer glisten the marbles of the old Monte Croce Church amongst the cypresses; farther than all, away there in the north there is Vallombrosa; the pinewoods at that distance are like cool blue shadows, and above them there is still snow, white as these fruit blossoms that the wind shakes against your hair.

A great artist has made his dwelling here; there

under those roof arches of green leaf is his open air studio. On the old stone terrace there is a litter of brushes and sketches, and books open at a verse of Dante or a page of Boccaccio. Beneath, in violet clusters, lies a mandoline. Under the ilex darkness stands a contadino; he has a wreath of golden tinted laurel in his hand; he has been a model for a study from the Decamerone. A window is half open into a chamber within; through the space there gleams the deep rose of a velvet curtain, and the ebony of an old cinquecento portrait frame. Within doors a sweet strong voice is singing half aloud a fishing song of Naples. Who sings like that? oh, only little Gillino, the gardener's lad, who is plucking the dead leaves off the trellis work in the open court there, beyond the doors.

Save for Gillino's singing and a little tremulous note from the mandoline, as a lizard runs across its strings there is not a sound on the sunny stillness of the day.

The artist paints on in silence under the ilex shade; the contadino erect before him with the sun full on his yellow jerkin and his black straight brows, and the tawny leaves of the winter-gilded laurel.

I, Pascarèl, come up through the fields where thousands of yellow daffodils are blowing and the peach blossoms are scattered by millions on the grass; come through the fields and vault the low walls and stand by the painter's side.

"You would make a much better Panfilo," said the artist, looking up with a smile of welcome. "Take Giaccone's place and let him go to his vines."

The peasant goes, nothing loth to be liberated,

and I take up the laurel bough and stand with the sun in my eyes.

"I am not young enough for Panfilo."

"You are young enough for anything," says the artist. "You will never be old."

So the painter paints on, and his Pamffilio stands there while the golden daffodils blow in the fields, and the city shines far down below, beyond the light clouds of the olive foliage.

Shall I never be old?—I, Pascarel? I felt very old to-day before I came up here amongst the white plum trees. I felt very old as I walked through the Frediano Gate this morning, across the Grève river, towards Signa, for where the red roses were nodding over the field walls, I met a little woman on a black mule with a great crate full of cackling poultry, and she was as plump as a guinea-pig, and was hung about with big cabbages in nets, and she screamed shrilly to her mule as she beat him. And she looked at me and started a little and crossed herself, and beat her mule afresh to hurry onward. Then I felt old.

Only the other day it seems she was a little round rosy laughing thing in the boat on the river, when the fireworks flashed red against the blue night sky; then she learned to dance the saltarello with the frolic of a kid, and her lips were like two cherries—only the other day!

Now,—on the Feast of the Dead that November morning, I was heavy of heart as I went along down into Florence. For what could I say, I thought, to my darling whom I had wooed and won? It seemed to me that for an honest man who had tried his best

to do right I had come as near to looking like a scoundrel as might be. I would never judge men again, that I swore to myself; for there was I who had suffered more than I cared to confess to myself for the fair face of that child, and had curbed and controlled myself in a way altogether novel to me, here was I who had endeavoured with all my might to do well by her, here was I, I say, become as nearly like a rogue, turn it which way I would, as a man can well become through the love of woman. And what a large latitude that is, all men know without my telling them.

And how I loved her! dear God! Well, what use was that?

I saw my way none the clearer for it as I stumbled down the stony road from Marco Vecchio, not being willing to see the donzella's two soft radiant eyes until I had faced the perplexities before me and solved them.

For how could I tell her the truth? And how could I tell her what was not the truth? One was as hard as the other.

Chance solved the question for me as it does often for most of us.

For when I got down into Florence that day there was a storm in the air. All about old bronze Porcellino, and in the square of the Signoria the people were clustering with dark words and darker brows, and it wanted but a touch of the match to the tinder to have had a day of darkness and bloodshed. There had been aggression and irritation, and they were sharp on the edge of revolt; and I knew the time was not ripe, and that they would only fill the graveyard

and prison, and I took their leadership, for they always loved me, and one must do one's best for Florence, and I spoke to them from the old Loggia as worthier men than I had done in older times; and so held them in hand all that day, and saved, as I may say without boasting, their bodies from shot and steel, and the city herself from feud and from flame. And at sunset for my pains I was arrested and borne away to the Bargello Tower, and when I asked my crime was told that I had harangued the people and incited them to tumult.

Old Porcellino knew better, but being of bronze he could not bear witness, and the people who could were not listened to; so in the Bargello I lodged that night amongst thieves and murderers, not able even to send so much as a word to the Capanna above Marco Vecchio, and fretting my soul bitterly because of the trouble I knew must be there on account of my unexplained absence.

The only thing I could hope was that some noise of the tumult and of my own arrest would be taken up the hills by some villager or another going home from the market in Florence.

On the morrow, quite early, they moved me from the Bargello for judgment; and the people wanted to rescue me, and were wild for a little space; but I begged of them to keep quiet, for the soldiery were strong, and I wished no Tuscan blood shed about me—a straw, a bubble, a player. The tribunal condemned me to three months of prison.

It was not the first time by half-a-dozen. I had seen the solitudes of Spielberg, and I had heard the water wash the dungeons of Venice, and I had been

quartered with the rats in old Vicenza, and had spent a few dreary weeks behind the fortress of San Leo, high above the rent and rocky land, on the bare peak against the blaze of the skies. For I had never been behindhand wherever the people had been moved against the Princes, and for many a rash word spoken in my Arte the feeble Dukes and the powerful Tedeschi had alike been adverse to me.

But that day the sentence fell on me like a thunderbolt. Before, it had been only myself that had suffered when the prison gates had closed on me; I was without a tear, without a pang; I laughed when I went in, I laughed when I came out. What was I that I should complain of what Boethius and Tasso had endured? But now—now I fear they saw that they hurt me, for what could my song-bird do, homeless and friendless in the snows of the winter, that were so soon to drive down through the open gates of the Apennine gorges?

I was heartsick that day as they took me through the old familiar streets in the noon-day sun back to the Bargello Tower, and for the moment I was remorseful that I had not allowed those streets to run with blood at daybreak when the people had clamoured for me.

For it is a bitter thing—perhaps as bitter as life holds—when you hear the bolts grate in their sockets, shutting you out from the living world, and know that for want of you that world may be worse than hell itself to some helpless female thing that is all adrift in it like a young bird in a storm. For there you are in your iron cage, and your bird may beat

her breast till death release her, and you cannot touch her through the bars.

For many days I heard nothing and could send no word, and so fretted my soul in sickly desperation, as many worthier men had done before me.

Somewhere about the twelfth day little Toccò came, having wrenched down a lamp-iron and done some other naughtiness to get taken to prison and have a chance to be near me—poor dear little lad—for this was his notion of loving one, and a notion so loyal that one could hardly believe that he had ever been born of a woman.

Toccò delivered me many messages from Brunóttá, and weeping and frightened brought out from round his little brown throat my old onyx ring with the Fates.

Then I knew what I had lost; I knew before he had told me that the child had fled away, none knowing why nor whither, in the dusk of that very day when they had arrested me in the Loggia of the Free Lances.

What had driven her away? I could not tell. Nor for one moment did I dream that the sin was Brunóttá's—men are such fools. I thought that in some manner she must have heard of my peril and have flown down the hillside in her wild innocent childish impulse to aid me, and so had come to some terrible woe in the city; and been killed perhaps—or worse. Who could say?

A child like that—sixteen years old—and fearless because knowing no evil, and beautiful in her way as the flushed flowers of the rose-laurel.

I dropped like a dead man, they tell me, and when they brought life back to me it came in the form of a raging fever—the only sickness that I ever remember in the whole course of my life.

Little Toccò got leave to tend me, and did it so well that I got over it when the prison leeches had abandoned me as only good for the graveyard. He said that I kept hold of the Fates in my hand all the weeks through; but raved of such a medley of cities and seasons and women's faces and poets' fancies, that none were a whit the wiser for what I said.

By the time I was strong again it was the end of my term of captivity. The lad capered and flung his cap for glee when the gates unclosed for us. But as for me, when that flood of dancing sunshine flashed upon my eyes I reeled like a drunken man. For the first time since I had run barefoot after my father's barrow the translucent living light of my Italy was hateful to me. For how could I tell if the child were living or were dead?

A good and loyal friend of mine was waiting for me, a worker in gold and silver, who dwelt hard by in the old street of the Ghibellines; he lies now in the fields by the village of Magentà.

I staggered into his workshop that day and sat down and felt like a man from beneath whose feet the solid earth splits and opens. I had never suffered greatly in my life before;—except in sympathy for grief outside myself—and be one as philanthropic as one may, one bears the woes of others more lightly than one's own,—but now I was dulled and dazed with the misery I felt. And misery to me meant utter bereavement in a wider sense of desolation than rich

men can know. Misery to me meant famine of the body and the soul and the senses. For if I could no longer laugh at Fortune, I must feel her buffets as the galled jade the lash. And if I had not my light heart to wander with, what wealth had I on the face of the earth?—for it is only by gaiety of heart that one can escape the thorns of the rough hedge-school which is only mirthful in one's Maytime when the hawthorn buds are fresh in blossom.

Well, they sent me out of Florence that night and forbade me the city. My friends tried to find trace of the child for me in Florence, and I tried hard in the country. But it was all of no use—no use. Some straw-plaiters in Settignano thought that they had seen a young girl in an amber skirt go down the oakwood-path towards the town one feast-day at early dawn. But that was all; and this slender clue broke in our hands and led us no further than those old oaks under the war-seared Vincigliata.

And the truth of the matter never dawned upon me—never once. All I could think of was that she had heard of my seizure in the Loggia and had tried in her rash innocent fashion to help me, and had so come to some horrible ending by some crime done to her that the guilty doers smothered.

I believe I was quite mad for the time, ranging north and south to find her. But that Brunotta had aught to do with her flight I never thought. Men are such fools.

One day in the spring-time I rested a little in a village in Friuli, whilst I was ranging Lombardy and Venetia in the vague hope to hear or find something of my darling.

Brunóttá was nothing to me, but how could I send her adrift—a little helpless, ignorant creature like that? She had loved me very much that San Giovanni's day and every other day afterwards, or at least so she swore twenty times in as many hours. I did not doubt the truth of it; perhaps I was too vain and thought too well of myself to imagine that a little empty-headed rogue out of the Casentino, who could not for her life have read or written her name, would ever be tired of me; of Pascarèl. Anyhow, could I send her adrift? A poor little simpleton whom I had taken for my whim and fancy away from her straw-plaiting and her goat tending, and could do nothing in the world except hop about on her little plump feet, and that too clumsily for any greater theatre than mine?

I had always winced at the sight or the touch of her since I had seen that child's eyes in the Cathedral square in Verona; but I would not be cruel to her. I had had so many pleasant sunny heedless foolish days with her, going over the length and breadth of the land in our idle gladsome fashion. Men are tender to women for remembrance's sake long after all love has died out of them. Brunóttá to me was like a little round brown bird out of the woods; I could not wring the bird's neck just because its homely little song had lost all music to me; I could hardly even fling it down the wind to go its own gait away from me. It was such an innocent little thing, I thought; and if it fell into the fowler's snare through my abandonment, things would go ill with me.

I joined her and the boys where of their own whim they had set up the Arte in a Friulian village. I wandered carelessly, stupidly, wretchedly, seeking only

one thing, and that always vainly. I had ceased to play; the laughter choked me; I did field work when I worked at all, and for the rest I had some few hundred pieces laid by with an old goldsmith in Florence, so that I could keep together the poor little troop, of which the lads and dogs—and the brown-eyed dancing girl too, as I thought—were all dependent on me for every mouthful of bread.

Pepito and Pepita had been poor stray brutes that I had saved from drowning; Toto had been sentenced to death as dangerous when I had cut his halter one day in Pisa, and showed the Guardia that his madness was nothing more than thirst; Toccò I had taken out of the hell of the galleys; Cocomero had been perhaps the most utterly desolate of all when I had found him in the streets; his father had been a clown, called Flageolet, who travelled with a French circus, and had been killed by a horse's kick in the ring that very noonday, leaving his son—without a coin in the world and leagues away from his birth-country—to weep his poor cowardly heart out in the burning sun of grim old Rimini.

We waited the night in a little place where a green bough above the door told us we could get wine and bread. It was only a little mountain village, too poor and small to have any regular place of resting. All Friuli is sad and unlovely; if it were not for the glimpses of the Alps away there towards Venice it would be hateful, that desolate historic land that had every rood of it stamped bare by the iron heel of Barbarossa.

This little village lies flat on the grey slope with nothing to break its melancholy and its barrenness

where it is swept by the sharp sea winds. The people were poverty-stricken and scraped the arid soil assiduously to get a bare subsistence from their wines and millet. It has been incessantly a battlefield in the times of the episcopal wars and of the aggrandizement of Milan, and it seems still as if the torch of war had scorched it sear forever.

Still even here the vine leaves were thick and green, and the grapes were budding in the little pergola, which the poor house that entertained us had managed to stretch out between doorway and garden wall in the teeth of the keen breezes that blow from the lagunes and the chain of the Tirol. In the heat of the noon I sat there, glad of the shelter of the leaves; bitterly sad at heart and tortured with a thousand imaginings of all that might have chanced to that young and pretty thing adrift by herself in the width of the world. I had tried all I knew to trace her and had failed; the madness and the suspense of it were eating away all the life of me. I reproached myself for a million things that I had done and had said and for a million things that I had not done and had not said. I seemed to myself such an utter fool; no better than a man who holds a diamond fit for kings in his hands and lets it slip through his fingers into a foul ditch where the toads can swallow it.

I sat there in the scirocco that blew like a furnace blast over the nakedness of the land; the insects were buzzing and booming in the thickness of the vine leaves; it was two o'clock in the day and quite quiet.

Presently in the drowsy stillness there came a murmur of voices; one was Brunóttá's. I was so used to hear it humming all the hours through without ces-

sation about millions of little odds and ends that served her for endless discourse; that I heeded it no more than a man who lives on a millstream heeds the noise of the churning water.

The sense of what she was saying drifted to me without my being aware; I heard as it were without hearing; I was so used to the sound of all her little shrill notes piping on by the hour over a mislaid ribbon or a smoked dish of macaroni.

"Pray take more care," it was saying now with a little stifled terror in it like a scolded child's. "He would beat me, perhaps, or you, if he got to know. He can be so violent when he is cheated."

"Why not let us run away?" whispered another voice, and this time it was the voice of my eighteen-year-old Coco. "You are afraid of him—afraid of your ears of him since that dreadful night the donzella went, and we do cheat him, as you say, and, when one thinks, it is not well—why not let us run away, right away?"

"How could we live? We have not a bit of talent hardly, you and I, and it would be very bad to starve," said Brunóttá. The practical objection always comes from the woman.

"But then if you love me?" murmured Coco; the man, you see, is always such an enthusiast, and always thinks that love is meat and drink.

"Oh, I love you best a thousand times," cried Brunóttá. "I used to think I loved him, and so I did, and specially whilst I was jealous of the donzella. But you see Pascarél is too great for me. He is always doing and saying some wonderful thing, and all that cleverness tires one; it is like walking on the tight

rope—don't you know? I can do that; but I am always so glad to jump down, so sick of being up so high. Pascarèl is just like the tight rope to me. But you are such another simpleton as myself, as one may say; and you are just my age, and you like to romp about and stuff your mouth with fruit and make an ass of yourself just as I do, and besides you have sworn you would go before the priest with me, and I should like to show my old foster-mother the ring on my finger—just to spite her—and besides I *do* love you, *Coco mio!*”

And with that she kissed him where these lovers stood together upon the other side of the vine leaves.

I thought it time to rise and walk out of the pergola. Brunóttá screamed and dropped upon her knees. Coco was as white as his ghost, and his limbs trembled under him.

I soon put them out of their misery.

“My dear children,” I said to them quietly, “instead of cheating me, why not have trusted me? Instead of deceiving me behind my back, why not have said all this to my face? You are two little fools, as Brunóttá has sensibly said, and you have succeeded in tricking a man who thinks himself no fool. The wiseacre is always served quite rightly in such cases. How long has this been going on—some months? Oh, I might have guessed that you had learned too many comedies by heart not to act them to your own profit some day. I might have wished indeed that it had been anybody but Coco—but after all, that is the merest sentimentality. You owe me so much? Altro! what of that? Ever since the world began, that has been only a reason for the debtor to pay his debts by

making a dupe if he can. If you wish to marry this poor lad, Brunóttá, pray do, I will not stop you. It will be very bad for him, but that is his affair—not mine. I have a thousand lire in Florence put by, that I always intended for you whenever we should wish to part company. Set up in life with it as best pleases you both, and only take my advice in one thing—never talk secrets close to a pergola in full leaf.”

And they did as I told them, and went before the priest, and bought a little piece of land with my money, two leagues beyond the Frediano Gate by Florence.

Coco indeed crawled at my feet and wept and cursed himself, and was all for not touching one of the thousand pieces. Men have so much more conscience and so much less common sense than women. But Brunóttá persuaded him out of those scruples, and chose the little bit of ground herself, and selected as the mission and fulfilment of her life the fattening of the finest turkeys in all Valdarno, which had indeed, she confessed, been all her life-long the secret and chief ambition of her dreams.

No doubt it is a thing to be duly thankful for when a little girl who has helped one to *filer le parfait amour* for a few foolish seasons takes to so decorous an end for herself as marriage and fat turkeys. It is a much more agreeable reflection than the water-lilies of Ophelia or the prison bed of Marguerita are to their lovers; and rids one of all responsibilities clearly. It would be manifestly absurd to reproach a man with having broken his mistress's heart or blasted her youth and her peace, when who will may see her plump and busy jogging on the Pisan road upon her

mule and selling poultry under a green umbrella hard against the Strozzi pile any market day at noontide. Still—such is the vanity of man, I suppose—one scarcely likes a little brown egg-wife to play the traitress to one with a poor scamp like Cocomero. And to have lost all that I lost through that little silly false-tongued thing is bitter—very bitter—sometimes.

For, when they were fairly married out of anybody's power to part them, and when the little bit of land had been made their own where the roses nod over the high dusty walls as you go up to the place where Arno's fury overthrew Castruccio's plans in the old times whilst all the glad Valdarno was a smoking ruin, when all, I say, was quite safe and sure with them, Coco, who was not a bad lad at heart, though timorous and deceitful, as it proved, came and threw himself at my feet and lay there on the ground as a beaten spaniel might, and bemoaned himself that he had got a thing to confess to me.

"Say on," I said to him. "If it be a new villany, make a clean breast of it. My dogs will not bite me, but they are the only things whose life one can save without being made to rue for it."

That was a harsh saying of mine, no doubt, but I was mad with pain of which I could say nothing to any creature, at not finding any trace of the donzella, and even this little miserable treachery of the lad Coco, whom I had befriended as far as I had been able ever since I had found him sobbing in the sun in Rimini, had cut me a little; one is always so weak in those things.

And then Coco, weeping like a child, confessed to me with sore terror that it was no fault of his own

that he had now to tell, but one of Brunóttá's which he had known long before, but had never dared to relate until she was surely bound to him, being foolishly fond of her, poor lad, and having set his silly heart on having her for his wife and dwelling with her on that dusty rood of land towards Signa. But now that she was fairly his own, and could no more fly away from him than his land could, and he was sensible that he was seeing the last of me, and had broken our fellowship by a piece of ingratitude for which he was sorely repentant, plucked up his heart and told me what he knew, and of how she had betrayed me that autumn evening under the vines below Fiesole. And so I learned at the last why it was that I had received back my onyx. Coco, I think, was terrified at the effect on me of his revelation; for when I came to myself he was grovelling at my feet and beseeching me not to kill Brunóttá; and indeed in that moment if she had come before me I could not have answered for myself very surely. These foolish vile things sting so deep—so deep—and then we are to let them alone *because* they are foolish and vile, forsooth! It is hard to hold one's hand sometimes.

He told me word for word as he had overheard it all, that scene under the vine by the Badià; and I needed no more to tell me the reason that the Fates had come back to me. And I had never once in the wildest of my fancies imagined that Brunóttá had been to blame. I had never once in my sharpest pain suspected that Brunóttá had been lying when she had run weeping out of the Fruilian shadows to lament to me for the loss of the donzella. No, I had never dreamed that her jealousy had been at work, and that

her rain of tears was all a lie; never once! men are such fools.

Well, it was over and done, and there was no help for it, and the poor foolish lad crouched aghast at his work at my feet. I bade him never let me see their faces again; and then I turned away and left the village as the sun set; and went where chance might take me. What did it matter?—the world seemed as empty to me as a shrivelled gourd. To me—Pascarèl—to whom the world had always been as full of red colour and of pungent flavour as any pomegranate that one cuts open in the first heats of April weather. The thing was over and done, I say, and as far as I know, the issue of it might have been that the child had already drifted dead down some mountain river, and the fair white body of her have been already thrust unshriven amongst the nameless and the lost in the marble desolation of some Campo Santo.

WE Italians love the soil, I think, more closely than other nations. I, wanderer though I have been all my days, I always want to tread again the grey Macigno after I have had the Alps awhile betwixt myself and Florence. One wants the light too; the dreamful radiance of the skies, that is neither so intense nor so blue, nor yet either so glittering as the poets and painters will make it, but is an endless ecstasy of light—light clear and pure and gentle, always soft, always silvery rather than golden; always tender and dreamful, like the eyes of a woman who lies awake and remembers the kisses of her lover.

So I came back here to the city so soon as my time of exile was ended, with little hope that she were living, but solely from long habit and love of the soil.

And as I entered the town, the people got hold of me, and would fain feast and welcome me, and bore me in the midst of them all down the old Oltrarno. And then—up on high, behind a barred casement against the corner of the Lion's Mouth—I saw her face, and then—

Well, then the sins and follies of my old life smote me from the lightning of the child's eyes of scorn; and she spoke words I merited, no doubt, but still such words as one cannot hear even from a woman twice; and so I saw my duty plain before me, and did it, though late in the day, no doubt.

It was long and tedious labour to find her father, more especially because I had to earn my daily bread, whilst I sought for him, by any such handicraft or labour of the roads as came to my share in the bitter, joyless, strange countries where the people only saw in me a travel-stained vagrant with a brown skin and a foreign tongue.

But I did her will at last, and found her greatness and fair fortune, and so sent her the roses in farewell, and knew that she was lost to me for evermore, the pretty, careless, sunny, wayward thing who had strayed with me through the Poets' Country whilst the blue lilies were in bloom. I am glad that I had strength to do it—yes, glad, surely, for her sake. For even had she been willing to link her life with mine, it would have been shame in me to lead her into my obscure and thorn-set paths of life whilst she was so young—so young,—and knew not what she did.

Yes, I am glad.

For, though one be but a strolling player, and never saw one's crown engraven save on a travelling tinker's old iron pot, still, when one bears a once-mighty name of Florence, one must needs try to be worthy of it by some poor shred of honour, at the least. Only for me, look you, all the world seemed dead.

God knows what I might have done in the weary days when I had sent her my farewell in flowers, and knew that every year of her life would only serve to make her higher and higher, farther and farther, away from me for evermore.

They were long burning days of drought and dust. The land was white with long thirst, and within the city the clouds of zanzari hooted all night long. For the first time in all my years of love for her the face of my Florence looked without beauty. Is not the beauty of all things so much within us, and derived so little from without?

God knows, I say, what evil or mad end to my life I might not have been tempted to put, in my heart-sickness and haste, had there not chanced to me a strange accident.

One blazing eveningtide, just as the sun was close on its setting, I was walking wearily down the Stocking-makers' Street, thinking of nothing in particular, when I came upon a little group of people gathered before the door of a Cantina.

It is a quaint, odd, many-coloured, picturesque street, as all the world knows; and what with its pretty crowded gay wares, and its narrowness, and its popularity, it is a street that will always talk to one;

it has done so much; the blood of Florence has coursed so often down it: and it has been a channel of the full Florence life ever since the Arts and Trades marched along it to set their flags round San Michaelè that brave day when Duke Walter was hounded out through the gates.

Calzaioli will always talk if you will listen—here on the stones that are still called the Song of the Lily it has heard the soft footfall of Ginevra's bare and trembling feet; here, where Guardamortà rose, it saw the Lion tremble before a mother's love; here in its workshop the Bronzino dwelt, and here, in its church, his bones were laid to final rest; here Donatello and Michelozzo laboured for the love of arts and men hard by yonder against the little Bigallo; here flame and steel ravaged their worst after red Arbià; here the White Bands shivered and fled before their old hereditary foes; here, on Ascension Day, the Signoria went up with the gold and purple of ripe fruits, to lay them at the feet of that Madonna of Ugolino whose manifold miracles sustained the soul of Florence beneath the Devil's Plague; here, on the Feast of Anna, it saw Walter of Athens driven out of the city, and all good men and true trooping thither to render her thanksgiving, and all the Arts raising in memory the statue of their patron saint and the shields of their blazonries—all these things, and a million more, has Calzaioli seen since its old towers and casements crowded hard on one another, and the destriers and palfreys champed below in the logge, and the painters and sculptors worked high above in the turretted roofs, worked amidst the challenge of silver clarions, and the clangour of brazen bells, the fret of horses'

hoofs, and the clash of crossing swords, the saucy laugh of the playing pages, and the sturdy tramp of the marching Trades.

Calzaioli will always talk to you, if you have ears to hear, and it was talking to me then, and I was heeding not at all the living throng around me, when my ear was caught by an air that was being played on a violin where the knot of people stood before the wineshop. I think I have heard most music that has ever rejoiced the earth; and at Pisa, amongst other things, I studied music as a science; but this air struck me at once as unlike anything else that I knew—quaint, delicate, fanciful, mournful, charming, and altogether new. I paused to listen with the rest.

A boy of about fourteen was playing, sitting on an old barrow that stood in the kennel of the street. He was very small and slight, and pretty as a child; his clothes were ragged, and he was very pale. It grows dark in Calzaioli long before the light has died in the open contado; there was a lamp lit in the doorway above his head; the great silvery pile of San Michaelle loomed beyond, with the saints and prophets white in the darkness. I stayed with the rest of them and listened.

The air had enchanted the people; they were humming it to themselves as it was played; and two country girls had caught it, and were singing to it a first and a second as they plaited on at their hanks of straw. It was just one of those melodies made to be repeated on every lip, and handed from town to town in every land: not because it was catching and common, but because that true divine spirit of music was in it which has an universal tongue and a life eternal.

All of a sudden, as I listened, the music of the violin ceased—snapped, as it were, and ceased; there was a little movement in the group; the musician had fallen backward in the gutter and the violin had dropped out of his hand.

I pushed the people aside and lifted his head on my knee. By his looks I thought he had fainted from hunger.

The people, looking frightened, began to edge away, still humming fragments of his melody.

“He does not belong to any of us,” they said, with little shrugs of their shoulders.

He did not belong to any one, poor lad; he had been seen in Florence for the first time for what anybody knew, playing along the Arno side for pence that day at noon. The beauty of his airs had drawn a little crowd after him. The people will wander after any harmony hour by hour anywhere over Italy.

Down in the gutter the lad lay, and if one lie there in Calzaioli, one is as sure to have a horse’s hoof in one’s face as Maytime is sure to bring cherries.

The wineshop people did not much like to let him in; but, nevertheless, as they knew me well, and in the old days of my fooling I had had many an idle night over their chianti, they gave way; and after a while, in their inner chamber, the lad came to himself, and opened great dark bewildered eyes on us. He was as handsome and small as a girl, with curls of Venetian gold lying soft and thick about his throat.

“I was playing—a moment ago?” he murmured, staring up into our faces. “It was in a street—what has happened?”

"You fainted, that is all," I told him. "Was it the heat, or are you ill, or what is it?"

White as he was, and bloodless, he coloured painfully.

"It was hunger, I think," he murmured. "I have eaten nothing for three days but a crust a dog left."

Knowing that, to do for him was easy.

He soon after sank into deep slumber, and seemed likely to sleep all the night; so I would not disturb him; but with the first of the daylight, as soon as the shutters were down, I, watching by him, saw his pretty eyes open; and then he was all for falling at my feet and blessing me, as though, poor little lad, I had been St. Michael himself who had called him up into paradise. When he got a little calmer, he told me his story. His name was Raffaello Baptista.

"You see, dear signor," said he, lifting his wistful, pitiful eyes to mine, "I belong to Verona. My mother, who was blind, was very very good, but she died more than a year ago, and I was very unhappy. Because my old master in music was dead too; and there was a lovely little lady who had always been my playmate who had disappeared in the strangest manner possible. She was much above me—oh yes, quite illustrious. Her people, I believe, were very great; only they never took any notice of her, so that it was not any good at all. When she was lost, all Verona said she was dead, because a girl's body was found in Adige, and the face none could see, being gnawed by the rats. But I was always quite sure that the good God had not taken her without letting me see her once more. And little by little I came to think that I would try to find her. My mother was dead and buried, and my

father drinks all day, and old Ambrogio, even, was gone; and so I thought to myself, no one wants me here, and I am kicked about like a useless little cur, and I am quite old now, thirteen come the Day of Ashes; and I will go and try and find out the donzella, and I am sure Mariuccia and the Mother will pray for me. And so off I came the very end of Quaresima, and I have been wandering, wandering, wandering ever since then, and never a sight of her face. Only once, in a hamlet, in the Romagna country, I heard of a girl who was singing, with hair all gold, like the wheat in summer, and the people spoke of her as L'Uccello; and then I took heart of grace to hear the old dear Veronese name, and I said, 'There cannot be two like that,' and I kept on and on till I came into Florence. Her brothers are all dead, and she is quite illustrious, you know, only so poor, so poor! And she and I were friends always, and always so happy together. And she has nobody at all but me; her old nurse died in the last wintertime, and of her people nobody knows. Have I money? Oh no. How should I? You see my legs are bare, and I have only this little pack—one shirt in it—and my little viol. But I have wanted for nothing. Nothing, nothing. Yes, I have come on foot all over the plains and the mountains. What of that? It has only been cold the last few months, and the people have always been good. I have played for them at feasts, at fairs, at bridals, at vintage dances, anywhere, always; and they have always given me a supper and a bed, and very often much more than that. Oh, I have not suffered at all—sometimes just a little, perhaps, from being tired, or out in the storms; and once some pifferari

set on me, and beat me, and threw me into a ditch, because they thought I was in the way on their rounds; that is all the unkindness I have had. I have been only a fortnight in Florence, and the last three days I have made no money. I have been too weak to play, and I have slept in the grass in the Cascine meadows, and I think I have got a little fever perhaps. To-night I wandered out into the street, and did play a little. You know the rest. I never shall find the donzella now. But—but—if I should die, will you let the poor little viol be buried with me? I should not like it to be burned as waste wood, though perhaps it is worth nothing more."

So he spoke, the poor little Baptista, sitting on the mattress in the inner room in the Cantina, and looking at me with his great pathetic eyes under the auburn tangle of his locks—such a pretty, fragile, heavenly-looking little lad; one would have had him painted as that boy-martyr whose head being severed from his body sang on day and night the sweetest Aves ever afterwards. His whole face breathed music; we have many such faces amongst us. Very often they mean nothing; but his meant all that it uttered.

I seemed to know him so well. Had I not heard of Raffaellino scores of times from the mouth of his playmate, as she went with me along the Adda or Arno water? Had I not seen him with his little mandoline, and his bare feet, and his red sash, that first day of Carnival in Verona?

He did not know what the memory was that stirred in me; but it made him like my own son, as it were, to me, and as sacred. Besides, I loved the lad for staying neither for sense nor prudence, but setting

forth to find his donzella in that innocent, foolish, childish faith and loyalty.

Now when I found Raffaellino in Calzaioli that night I was very little better off in the world than he; and the lad being very ill and altogether destitute, I had need to cast about me for some surer manner of maintenance, or let him drift away to the hospitals and the sepulchre. It seemed to me that the boy came in my way like a duty there was no means of escaping. My own faulty fashion of living had cost so much anguish to the child that had gone with me through all the fresh green Tuscan summer; and it seemed to me now that to do my best by her favourite playmate was the only sort of poor atonement that ever would lie within my reach.

So whilst Raffaello was stretched on the sacking in an attic amongst the roofs in the Street of the Stocking-weavers, I took thought as to a means of livelihood.

Now I had absolutely nothing.

The little I had saved had gone for that bit of land in the Valdigrève. I could always gain my day's bread and lodging by a turn amongst the vines, or a few hours in the modelling shops, or by taking a fiddler's place in the little opera houses, or by showing the trick of the clay to some young sculptor; for I have a sort of desultory universal talent, which is in a manner the most general curse of my countrymen—an over fertility of invention that is very apt to end in absolute sterility of achievement.

Little Toccò had gone as a pupil and 'prentice to Orfio Orlanduccio, and was thought of good promise in the art, so that I had no soul in the world to work

for; and where is the Italian who will work for mere work's sake?

It is not possible to us. Give us an end and we will labour as well as other men; but without some impetus we will not serve that grim and ghostly Northern Thor whose hammer has struck down all the wild roses and tossing hawthorns and sweet skylarks of the world's soft smiling, useless, leisurely, heaven-sent joys.

If we are happy, let us lie in the sun and dream of it; and if we are unhappy, what else better can we do. For Italians do not kill themselves; why, I cannot say; perhaps from fear of Dante's Circles, or perhaps from sheer love of the mere plant-like sense of living; why, I will not say, but they do not.

The fifth night after I had found him, I went up the dreary Sdruciolò by the Pitti to get a little fruit for him, and I had nearly resolved to go to Carrara as soon as he should prove able to be moved. The mountain air might do him good, and there was always work enough for any one who knew how to chip marble; and the life there, where all the sculptors' dreams take shape, amidst the white desolation of the quarries, with the keen mountain solitudes all around, was most unlike (and therefore least painful to me of any) the life that I had led with my gay little Arte.

I was known there. It had even happened now and then that, finding some artist struggling with a fine fancy that he could not to his liking embody in the clay, I had had the luck, by a fitful night's work, to call up the Andromeda or the Spartacus that escaped him, and the figure has gone forth—mine, if

I had cared to claim it—and now and then, I have even heard, has made the other man's fortune. What did it matter? it was only an accident, a knack, a turn of the hand, more or less happy, that chanced to put fire into a soulless model. What matter who claimed the statue in its city market-place? When we love Art for Art's sake, we are pained by a line awry, a note discordant, a colour misplaced; but we are not pained by a name being lettered in gold instead of our own?

To Carrara, therefore, I thought I would go. But as fate would have it, as I thus resolved, I ran against, in Sdrucchiolò, a little plump, oily Piedmontese, by name Luca Pestrò, who had rolled a good deal of gold together, as the men of Piedmont have a knack of doing, and was the director of the Goldoni Theatre in this city and of another larger one in Turin.

I knew Pestrò very well, he having been a gay, jovial soul before he had taken to money-making, and we had had some merry days together years and years before in France, where he was travelling with a choice company of marionettes, whose joints were as stiff and as dire a trouble to him as the tempers of any living troops of actors.

Pestrò flew across the narrow passage to me, and cast his arms about me, with tears in his eyes and his dress all disordered. I had not met with him for at least five years.

"Pascarè! oh, Pascarè! What ever good angel has dropped you here?" he cried, in hot haste, still holding me by both arms, whilst the men and the mules pushed by us. "Do you know Ferraris is dying—struck speechless up at his villa only an hour

ago—and he to play to-night to all the Princes, and I at such expense as never was;—and now all ruined unless indeed you would take the character yourself?”

I told him I had heard it as I came up the Sdrucchiolò; people were heavy of heart for it; for Ferraris, though in the decline of his years, was the greatest player that the stage of Italy then numbered amongst its actors.

Well, in a word, he so besought me and wrought on me to take Ferraris's place, that I, thinking of Raffaellino, at last assented.

The doors of the Goldoni opened at eight of the clock. But I needed little preparation; the costumes of Ferraris were about my measure, and for the part I knew it all well: in the old times, with the Zinzara and her people, we had played the “Don Marzio alla Bottega del Caffè” many and many a time in the little sea and mountain towns of the Riviera and the Basque country. A glance, and all the old eloquence came back to me. I heard, as though it had been yesterday, the sonorous roll of the Zinzara's voice as she had first taught me the part by the light of a single candle, in her little attic, with her slender feet bare on the bare bricks, and a red japonica-flower thrust into her rough hair, and a great brown sausage hissing itself solemnly into readiness for supper over the charcoal stove, and through the broken lattice of the garret always the glimmer of the moonbeams and always the shimmer of the sea.

Poor woman! Was she dead? I wondered. It is strange how suddenly they flash into our lives, and how utterly they drift out of it, all these women!

I thought of the Zinzara—of nothing else—as I took the place of Ferraris, and, for the first time since I had played with her in those old dead days, passed on to the stage of a theatre “with a roof to it,” as my Piedmontese’s phrase had run.

That night was one of the strange accidents which have the force of gods—or devils—to change the tenour of men’s lives.

When the curtain fell, my fame was crowned in Florence. I—the people’s Pascarello—had the ball at my foot to play with it as I would.

The whole city seemed to go mad for me; they took me home to my garret in riotous homage, and stayed under my window half the night singing my *Io triomphe*.

Much was due to the time, no doubt. I had become to them a sort of incarnation of Free Italy, and I always love to believe that it is less Pascarel the Player they care for than it is Pascarel the Patriot; and if indeed it be so, how little, how very little, it matters that one is not likewise Pascarel the Prince.

From that night my fame spread, and spread, not only in this country but in all others, like circles on water from a well flung stone. In a few months’ space every hour of my art could be counted by gold and diamonds. And for Raffaellino I accepted it and worked; the little angelic lad saved my reason certainly, my life perhaps.

For the winter, any or all of the cities hire me, and they bid much higher for me, one against another very often, than I am surely worth; but, when the vines are in blossom, I always come back under the Cross and the Lily, and play all the summer through

to my own people in this dear city of mine, a Florentine once more and nothing else.

For the other cities I am the Pascarèllo of the kings, and the wits, and the great ladies, and the pleasure seekers, and I have as many gold boxes and honied words as Marzzoco in the old days had kisses from captives. But here I am the Pascarèl of the people who come trooping to me out of the scorching streets and burning squares, that are even hot when the moon is high, and in from the sun-baked contado, where the grapes burn black in the fierce scirocco.

Here I am myself once more, and I have my own populace about me: and the foreigners seek me with bribes in their hands and say, come with us to Baden, to Monaco, to Belgium, to Russia, to heaven knows where not, and I will not go; I stay here in the summer and play as I choose in the open air theatres with the wings of the swallows over my head, and the eager brown faces of my own people around me.

If half the year I did not hear that deep chested, sonorous vibration of Italian laughter that is like the metal tones of great melodious bells, I should lose heart and manhood. It has been about me all my life, I cannot do without it. It is to me as the trumpet call to the trooper's horse. And there is no laughter like it under the sun; just, so I often think, must the young gods have laughed when Pan piped to them.

And so I have played on from that time until now, for sake of the little tender lad who dreams his days away in music in a little home that I have made for him looking on an old green convent garden

behind the Palace of the Torrigianni. Besides, one must do something, or go mad.

And going up under the pale walls where the field roses are nodding, in the sunny road towards Signa, I meet Brunóttá on her mule, going to sell her birds in Florence. She is plump, and brown, and cheery: she thrashes her beast, and shrieks shrilly to the fowls in her panniers. And I once cared to caress that little foolish sulky face! Oh God, what fools men look to themselves when they see themselves in the mirrors of their old dead loves! I feel chilly and grown old.

The crickets sing in the canes by the shallow Grève water, and the little red roses are bright on the edge of the grey dusty wall; but for me—I feel old, I say.

What brought me this way to-day?

THERE I stand with the laurel wreath in my hand. The laurel is not green, it is yellow from the passing of winter: laurels should always be painted so, for who gathers them in his spring time?

The daffodils blow to and fro by millions, in the fields; the vines are everywhere thrusting out their little tender buds; down there, beneath the shimmer of the olives, lies my City of the Lilies.

My friend paints on at his study of Panfilo, and tells me that I shall never be old; he will have it that artists never are. Perhaps there is some truth in it. In a sense we are children to the end—children who are ready to laugh even in our tears, and whose

gayest laughter has always a sob in it; children so, no doubt. Children who after all know that the only real good that can come to them will be to be lulled into forgetful sleep in the arms of the great nursing mother, Death.

The painter rises and breaks off a bough of laurel fully budded, and brings it to me.

"Take this instead," he says; "your laurels are not tarnished nor faded."

For the matter of that I differ with him.

"I prefer those wrinkled ones flaked and crumpled with the winter's frost. They are very much more true, I say.

"Yet I have nothing to do with laurels of any sort, unless I hold them as deputy for Madama Pampinea. Get me those dandelion heads, blow balls as the old poets call them, they are my prototypes, for they are light as feathers, and arrow headed, and all the four winds of heaven toy with them, and no one marks where they fall. If a player is painted with any emblem, he should be painted with those puff balls. Their place in creation is very much about what his own is."

So I say. But he will not paint me with my puff balls; he paints his Panfilo holding a branch of amber tinted laurel. He tells me that I always look as if I had stepped out of the Decamerone; I tell him that every Florentine does the same. We have our father's faces, if not our father's force and our father's florins.

It is absurd to paint me with even a dead laurel; I Pascarèl, a player. I have a sort of fame now, it is true, but what is the fame of a player? I said long

ago, the mere breath of a breeze that drives the comets of man's wonder a little before it for one hour, and with the wind sinks to utter silence, and cannot stir so much as a baby's paper windmill were it ever so.

I used to be so happy in the old life of mine. I think few men, if any, lived so long as I and had so little care. Merriment, freedom, air, and pleasure; I had them all, the petals of the four-leaved shamrock, which here and there one in a million finds and gathers, having the wit to know where to look for it, not in kings' gardens, but in little cool, green, darkling nooks of life, that bubble with the waters of content.

I had always been happy from the time that I first ran bare-legged and bare-headed in the Tuscan sun after my father's barrow. I was really and truly the last of the Pascarel princes; so he said, my poor father, if he were not crazed, and indeed I suppose it is true enough. But what was that to me? It was much more to me that I had the lithest limbs in the Salterrello of any one north of Abruzzi; much more to me that the girls leaning across the rails of the loggia in the summer nights had ripe red lips that always smiled on me. I was happy tinkering the old pots and pans, from the Aquilean marsh to the Sorrentine orange woods; I was happy studying all lore, virtuous and iniquitous, in the sad old ways of Pisa, and following even into occult paths, the steps of Paracelsus and Agrippa; I was happy when I went seaward with the Zinzara and her people, to make sport and laughter all along the bright sea road from Savoy to Basque; and happiest of all when, with no master but my own whim and fancy, I sauntered through the world and

then came home this side the Alps, and set up, year after year, wheresoever I would, my little wooden theatre in some silent, shadowy grass-grown square of any old forgotten city, or amongst the hyacinths, and the poppies, and the asphodels of any sunny hillside field; the time when I lived with the country folk and the craftsmen, and when the very best that could be said of me was, "There goes that vagabond; some wit? Oh, yes; over his wine cups, so they say; but only a stroller, that goes a-foot from place to place and carries his baggage like a pack horse, nothing more."

Life was a merry and gladsome frolic, if a sigh ran under it on occasion; so it seemed to me, I say, then, when the brown contadina grinned at my mirth, and the young coppersmith hid his tears at my woe. But now, when they call me a great genius, and despots laugh and their consorts weep at the things that I say and the things that I do on the stage of the world's great theatre, now I feel myself no better and no wiser than any soap bubble that a child's breath floats upwards on the air. The heart is gone out of the jest for me; and as for the pain—well, it lies too close to me now; so close, that when I make them laugh at it, I seem to make them mock my own. Can you understand?

Nay—who should understand an artist? We do not understand ourselves.

They call me great. Well, so be it, if it please them. But for me, I know that I was nearer greatness under my old torn canvas roof. For the artist is only great when he lives in the ideal life of his imaginations, and when his own heart aches, how can he do

that well? When the rack of the Real holds him tight in its iron jaws, how shall he sport and sleep and smile, in the arms of the Dream Mother?

"Have you seen Pascarel, the great Pascarel?" they all say; and all the world runs to stare.

At times I play my own pieces, and then they say too, "What a genius he has!"

Nay, it has even so happened that a king has called me to his seat to give me a diamond box, and that a great princess has cast to me her own bouquet of orchids in a band of jewels. They run after me in the streets, and they sell my portrait betwixt the newest courtesan and the last murderer. Who can want more than that of Fortune?

Nay, nothing that I know of: only where is the light heart with which I used to toss down the poor mountain wine after I had acted to an audience of stonecutters and vinedressers away there on the grey Apennines? Ah, light hearts do not tarry with laurels. This artist friend of mine does rightly to paint the laurel with edges sear and torn. That laurel that Panfilo held, though gathered in the gardens of delight, it must surely have borne the taint of the plague somewhere about it. Did the laughter on their lips never make those storytellers shudder?—I shudder sometimes, now, at mine.

I am a fool: oh, I know that well. What was a child with a sheen of yellow hair and a voice like a lute, that she should change the face of the world and the laughter of men to me?

Nothing in reason, I know, but then reason has so little to do with one's life, and when one cannot

so much as tell whether the thing one cares for be living or dead;—that is hard, you see.

Pascarèllo! Pascarèl. When a village ran at my heels with welcoming clamour sending my name over the budding vines and the crimson glow of the field tulips, how well it was with me; I asked nothing better of heaven or earth, than just to laugh on in my own fashion through the careless spaces of the happy years. But now, though all the cities cry it out, and men come to me with gold in their hands, where is the charm? I felt old to-day, I say, as I went by the grey Grève water, where the little red roses were all alive and glad in the living sunshine.

And yet it is April too; and I am here in my City of Lilies.

“You waste half your year,” said a Frenchman to me the other day. “You fling away on your Florentines in the summer all the fortune you make in the winter in Russia, and Paris, and Rome.”

Well, if I do: I love my Florentines better than Russia, or Paris, or Rome: and, what do I want with a fortune?

Besides, I like to be free in the glad summer weather, when the fireflies flash all along the ground and the magnolia trees are all white with flower.

Perhaps I am idle by nature, an Italian is sure to be.

One fierce summer noon I espied a letter-carrier going out for a day’s pleasuring at a fair in the contado, and stowing the post-bags of a whole district away in a cupboard behind his house door to await his return on the morrow. I asked him how he re-

conciled the dereliction to his conscience. He looked at me with wide open innocent eyes of surprise.

"Che diamine, signore! The fair will not wait; if I do not go to-day, I go never. But, as for the letters, they will wait very well. No one knows what is in them, so no one is expecting anything; and, no doubt, they are all bad news, letters always are, and the poor people will be all the better for having another day in peace."

With which he turned the key on the post-bags, and jogged happily off on his donkey with red ribbons flying from its ears.

So on in like manner, I being idle and always at heart a vagabond, shut the gold bags out of sight and come to the fairs in the summer, only instead of sure-footed Dapple I have a shying Pegasus; and there are no red ribbons at its ears, but only the frayed ends of tattered fancies; and when I get to the fair, the fun of it is flat and jarred to me now like a bell that has cracked in a fire.

It is odd too. In the old time, when I made a score of woolcarders weep like children, or a handful of stonecutters laugh in their dry dusty throats under that canvas roof of mine, that blew with the winds, and rocked with the rains, and shone yellow with the sunshine; in that time it always seemed to me that the Player after all was the greatest artist of them all, since turn by turn he was a breathing statue, a moving picture, a poet who spake aloud, and a musician whose syrinx was no less a thing than the million-chorded passions of mortals, strung on the echoing shell of human sympathy. So it always seemed to me in the old times.

It used to be pleasure enough just to be in the sun and hear the cicale's zig-zig, and watch the big black fortuna buzz amongst the magnolia flowers, and beckon a brown-faced buxom girl up the path under the vines with her arm full of peaches and her lips ready for kisses. It used to be pleasure enough, all that; but now, there is wit enough in the cities, and there are women, handsome enough and ready enough with their laughter, and it is a gay, mad, zestful life, this life in the gas glare, and the masqueing, but still there is not much flavour in it. Perhaps it is because I have won all such graces and glories as there are to win—graces of a string of glass beads, glories of a truncheon of rushes.

Well, say I am great in my fashion, say I write what I please and I say what I please, and I am true to the duties of the Pantomimi and the Pasquin, whom every player worth his salt represents, in thrashing the tyrants with my scourge of asses' tails, and in showing the great world its ridicule in my triangular fool's mirror. Say I am great, so far,—pretty much as is the barber's brass basin which reflects its audience with their faces so lengthened or widened, that they perceive for the first time all that is grotesque in their features. Well, the brass basin only holds soapsuds, and sometimes I think I myself hold nothing better. But whether I am great or little the flavour has gone out of my life.

That is thankless enough. Yes, I know. They call me a wit and a poet, they call me Martial and Plautus, they say I am a Boccaccio in motion, and an Ariosto in motley. Well, it is all very pretty, if it be not all very true; and they know that once down

there in the cheerless spring of Novara, it was not with a sword of lath that my blows were given; they know that in Pascarel the Player there is also a little—just by that saving grace, a little—of Pascarel the Patriot. And that last title I like much better than the old one my forefathers owned of Pascarel the Prince. But still the flavour is gone somehow.

Now and then, when the lads are around me and we go by moonlight through the streets, and some one strikes a chord from his mandoline and the shrill fresh voices rise, raising the echoes from palace and prison, the old spirit comes over me, and I drive them with words of fire, and I make them laugh, just such riotous, endless, rippling laughter as the torrent laughs in the sunshine, springing from stone to stone. Then I am the Pascarel that the people knew, who was gay all day long like a grillo. But it will not last now, and when I am quite alone it seems to me that the world is weary as it seemed to me only to-day down there by the grey Grève water.

“It is the idle hour,” says Varkò, the painter, going into his room, which is heavy with the scent from great sheaves of mugghetti that fill a score of Montelupo bowls and Majolica dishes. “Lie here a little while and smoke, and Ninetta will bring fruit and wine; meanwhile do you look at my winter’s work, *my Mona Lisa*.”

“You are profane,” I tell him; but he is indifferent to the thunders of heaven that in justice should smite him for thus taking in vain the name of a god. He

pushes me gently back into the shadow and then goes across the room and draws back the velvet curtain that is catching the full light on it. As the purple cloud sinks away, the light shines instead on a picture set in a dark frame of cinquecento carving, that is heightened here and there with a gleam of smalto in heralds' devices, and is surmounted by a ducal crown. It is only a woman's portrait.

Behind her there is a scarlet frame of oleander; she leans on a trecento balcony; her dress is of a curious dead gold, it is open at the throat and breast, and against the white skin a knot of vermilion-coloured carnations glow; there is a broken lute at her feet; she does not smile; one would say that she knows why the cords are snapped, why the music is still.

Red and gold! how the picture burns! And the woman's face is beautiful in the midst of all the fire; and one would say that the last love-song she will ever care to hear has been sung on that shattered lute.

Somehow, though it is summer with her, and girlhood with her, and those oleanders are flowers of Florence; somehow you know well that there is a great silence round her, a silence as of things that are dead.

It is a strange picture.

I stand before it blinded and confused. What is it I see? I hardly know. In impatience, he asks me what I think; what I think?

Who knows so little as I?

Rudely I tell him that his oleander should not beam so radiant-red as that, Tiziano always painted his summer roses in dull semitones; Tiziano's—beside

his woman's cheeks—are cool and pale, and have no flush on them. So I say to Varkò; and all the while my eyes gaze into that oleander glory; and the woman's eyes look back at mine, and all manner of dead dreams raise their heads like little snakes around me.

Varkò is speaking to me, that I know; but the sense of what he is saying is vague and imperfect to me. Perhaps he is telling me the history of the portrait. What need of that?—there is the broken lute.

“And her name?” I ask him suddenly.

My heart stands still as it were, and a rush of heat and life seems to throb through those Fates, that have been so heavy and so chill on it so long. I ask under my breath, as one speaks of the dead; I know that I am afraid of the answer. Afraid as I never was of that fiery sea of slaughter, down there by the field of Novara.

Varkò laughs aloud: a laugh that seems to me to echo jarringly through the stillness of the lily-scented air.

“Have you heard not a word of all I have been saying?” he cries to me. “It is scarcely a portrait: have you not heard me, indeed? And yet it is herself, just as I saw her in the last summer in Florence; I changed nothing. Nay, the oleanders burned as red as that behind her in the sunset. I know the Titian roses are all pale; but still, I have painted as I saw. It always seems best to me to do so, or try and do so at the least. All that red, all that gold, they would kill any other woman's face, but they do not kill hers. It is an old Florentine dress of cloth of gold, you see.

She was ready for a costume ball. She came out on to the balcony—just so,—the sun was setting. I sketched the scene, and showed it to her on the morrow. So the picture grew. And, now, what shall I call it? Not her name, she will not have it. It might be the ‘*tanta rossa*’ of Dante: or, I thought, of the mistress of Giorgione; she might have looked just so upon his balcony in Venice; and the lute is broken—there will be no more music in her life,—a little space, and the red oleander leaves will be falling like rain upon her grave and his. The picture would tell all that Giorgione story, not ill, I think. You see, under that lowest blossom to the left I have put the little arrowy head of an asp that will serve for the symbol of the plague. I asked her once if I might call it so, and she said: ‘As you like; only Giorgione’s mistress would smile, I think; she would know that death was about to be merciful to them both. But, as you like,’ she said; ‘as you like.’ So I can call it so. And it is more Venetian than Florentine in colour after all. Her name? I wonder that you have to ask. The world knows you both so well. She is often in Florence, but she is not here now. She is the daughter of a great personage, a very great personage.”

Then he lets the purple cloud of the curtain fall again over that fire-glow of the flowers, a little angered with the doubt that Titian’s roses being pale, he perchance is wrong. But I stand looking at the shadow that had fallen and see still the oleander, and the broken lute, and the eyes of the woman which have no smile in them as the eyes of Giorgione’s mistress would have had.

For the face of the picture is to me as the face of one risen from the dead.

A great personage, so he says, leaning there with the gold tissues falling all about her on the marble, and the Florentine carnations in her breast, and the gleam of jewels on her throat and forehead, and at her feet the lute, whose broken chords she, with all her greatness, could not heal again so that they would ever breathe forth the old, sweet, simple, tender notes. A great personage: yet surely also the child that had once gone with me through the lily-whitened grasses and the moon-lightened fields of maize, singing as the birds sang and careless of the morrow.

I feel chilly and grown old, as I felt by the side of the grey Grève water, where the sun had flashed amidst the canes. For there is no ghost whose breath is so cold, as the ghost of a love that is dead; and I have met two this day, this April day, when the soil is all yellow with daffodils, and all the earth is glad.

Would it be better to know her under the dusky marbles of some aisle of graves, in the mouldering heart of some world-forgotten city, or to find her great like this, with jewels in her breast, and that strange haunted look in her eyes?

The lute is broken: does she remember, I wonder?

Has she forgotten the days on the sunny hillsides, by the shallow brook waters, and the leaves of the vines, and beneath the murmuring poplars? Has she forgotten? Has she forgiven? What can it matter—anyway—if she be great like this?

She must be dead to me, you know.

And that living death is worse than the death of

the grave, they say; that living death when the voice speaks still to all others, and only is silent to you. And yet the world is full of these things! One wonders the sun still drags on its way; one wonders all men are not mad.

The seeding grass was wet with torrents of blood down there on the March day of Novara, and the cannon balls, as they swept through the rising corn, did the work of the harvest sickle. How came Fate to miss me amongst the slain? I wonder;—and grow old.

I have tried to love other women; I have told other women I did love them; but I do not think they believed me, and I know I did not believe myself.

And now that I have seen that picture—yes, that is, of course, how she must be; a great lady, with a knot of diamonds in her breast. There is not much left in her of the bold, shy, pretty, saucy child that I walked through Verona with, that night of the Veglione. Nothing left probably, not even perhaps a regret.

A flush of shame at most, perhaps, when this brilliant illustrissima remembers how she roamed the fields and hills with a troop of strolling comedians; remembers too, maybe, now and then, that one of those wandering players set his lips to her cheek and held her little hand in his in the autumn hour, when the wild anemones were all aglow beneath the brown Badià.

Well, no one will ever know that I remember it too. She last and least of all; if ever I should meet her.

There are things one is bound to forget, or, at least, that bind one to live as if they were wholly forgotten.

And what is Oblivion if it be not Age? I feel old, I say, as I felt at noon where the little red roses nod by the Grève stream.

"You are sure there is never a scorpion?" says Astra, the actress, to me this April day, when at sunset we go up together to the great open-air theatre that draws all Florence to it on summer nights where it stands under the pine woods on the hillside beyond the Gate of the Cross.

"You are sure there is never a scorpion?" says Astra to me, bathing her fair face in the lilies and lying breast downward in the grass with the vine-shadows playing, as if in love with her, over her soft, indolent, wanton limbs.

I tell her no; but alas! grow the lilies ever so richly there is always a scorpion somewhere for me.

That is just because a man ever desires the thing he has not, you see; most surely desires it of all when that thing is called woman. For the lilies are yellow as soon as gathered, but the scorpion stings on and on, on and on.

I talked with a scorpion once; an old, old scorpion, long as my hand, and hoary as Esau with length of years. I found him, and made his acquaintance in a prison in Venice long, long ago, where the Stranieri lodged me three months or so for having spoken words too strong and too seasoned one riotous Carni-

val time, when I had rolled my first little Arte under the wings of the Lion.

The old scorpion never hurt me but would lash his tail and talk by the hour together. He had heard the sad tale of the wild Lagoon waters and the sigh of the Gondolier's Stali! for ages and ages and ages there in his sea-girt chambers; since first he had come from the East, no bigger then than a scarabeus, hidden in a fold of gold tissue that one of Dandolo's men had brought with him from mighty Byzantium, and thrown on the couch of his mistress one amorous night in August. The scorpion stung her and she died—why not? there is always a sting in all love, and perhaps the quickest death to it is the kindest.

He had seen many things and many centuries this old wise bearded scorpion of Venice, and one day when he sat in his chink,—a black blot in a line with the sun,—I asked him to tell me, since we were good friends together, what was the secret and source of that mystical power for which my human kind was wont to curse him and his; and slay them and embalm them in oil as dead Pharaohs were buried in perfume.

The old scorpion made me answer; he who had lived in the beautiful wanton breast of that Venice, which men have called the harlot of Italy; the old scorpion made me answer.

“What do we slay with? And what is the death in our sting? A venom that is as that fire which no water quenches, and as the grave-worm that no feast of flesh can slake? What is that, you fool, with which we arm ourselves and strike where we will and never fail? Listen here then, and know that this for which

you all curse us is born of yourselves, not of us. For in the beginning of time when Death came forth from the gates of hell on the bloodless white horse and was set free to pace to and fro the world, and scatter desolation as he would, Death scattering himself broadcast in many shapes and fashions, Death one night made us the scorpions and set us to run over the earth.

"The first scorpion was only a harmless big beetle at the beginning, ugly, of course, but quite innocent, but Death took it up and steeped it in two human hearts that all bleeding and smoking lay in the hollow of his hand. And from the man's heart the first scorpion sucked desire, and from the woman's heart it sucked jealousy; and when it had sated itself of these to the full, Death set it down on the ground.

"Now be fruitful and multiply," he bade it. "And do your work on the human race, for you have a venom in you that never will die while the world rolls on round the sun."

So the old scorpion talked, blinking at the light from the sea walls in Venice.

And now,—bloom the blue lilies ever so brightly, there is always a scorpion somewhere for me.

For Astra and Poppea there is a great supper spread this April night, under a tent at midnight when our play is over. They have acted superbly, and they have had all the glory their souls could desire, and they laugh à gorge déployée, their red lips parting over their snowy teeth, playing with flowers in bands of jewels that some of the nobles have flung to them. They are famous, and spoilt, and capricious, and

cruel sometimes, and jealous always; and like children in their mirth, as all artists are all the world over.

The white folds of the tent flutter, the torches flicker in their brass sconces, the young actors have dressed the canvas with boughs and pennons and fluttering scrolls; where the curtains open there shines the white radiance of magnolia trees that grow just there on the hillside, and whose closed cups are silver in the moon.

There are laughter and jesting, and such amorous follies as women like Astra and Poppea await whenever their eyes may beam upon the sons of men. They lie there like Tiziano's women, and their jewels gleam and their pretty hands crush the bursting fruits; and without, down the hills, the people troop away shadowy, cloud-like, singing as they go, the sweet sounds grow fainter and fainter as they stream farther away under the low stone pines.

We ourselves go down the hill together a little later; it is the fancy of Astra and Poppea to leave their horses champing by the gates and use their own pretty listless lightsome feet.

Their silken skirts shiver over the grasses, sweeping down the lilies; the young men go before them with flute and mandoline singing the Invitation of Paesiello; there are gleams of blue where the iris are growing, the air is full of magnolia fragrance, the night is as clear as the day, it is past one of the clock, Florence sleeps silvery and very still.

A shrouded figure passes us masked, Astra and Poppea shrink a little; it looks dismal in the moon; they take it for some brother of the Misericordia. I

see that it is a woman. But why masked, and on the hills too? It is not even Carnival.

We go on through the gates into the silent city, the sleepy guards let us through, the music and the singing wake all the echoes as we pass along the dark old streets and under the Church of the Croce.

The lads sing more sweetly as they go by and their voices drop to a tender minor key; they remember that Michelangelo and Leonardo lie there. Now and then a woman drops a rose to us from her lattice; now and then a lover comes out from some vaulted doorway, looking warily to see if any tale-bearer be lurking near; now and then a stream of light falls from some balcony where two shadows lean one on the other.

So we go on through the silent city, on into the square of the Signoria, and here, late though it is, there are men grouped together in little knots, murmuring eagerly, with their cloaks cast about them and their faces flushed and dark.

We have left Astra and Poppea at their palace; the youths have ceased their singing; we pause by the Cathedral and look up; someone has set against the bronze Judith a flag of three colours; the red in it glows like blood in the silver glistening cool Florence night.

"What is it?" we ask; we have lost our memory up there on the hills in music, and have forgotten for the moment the storm that hovers northward where the city of Virgil lies.

"What is it?" we ask, whilst the Judith bends her brows against the moon.

They answer us in one word.
"War."

WAR again away there in the North.

As I go homeward by myself I am glad.

I am tired of Astra and Poppea, of the masquing and the folly, of the paper laurels and the hobble of lead, of the showers of gold and the laughter of fools.

I come upstairs to the broad tapestried chamber where the moonrays lie so white upon the marble floor, and I go to an old chest and I take out the old knapsack and the old musket that I carried years ago over the Lombard fields.

After all, they are the truest friends a man has; after all, when one is a Florentine, one is a soldier before one is anything else.

They lie there in the moonlight, old battered moulded war-worn things; on the barrel of the musket there is red rust, it was a fellow-student's life blood; I never had the heart to touch it. How shabby and broken the knapsack is, too; it was nearly new that day in Pisa when I saw the Zinzara and her people troop by under the old grey walls, and went after them on the same sea road and caught them as they travelled along in the dust, singing and eating their cherries.

There are the cherry stains now on the leather, for she would fill it with fruit, I remember; the stains are black,—a dying man leaned his head on it amongst

the crushed grass whilst a burning village smoked in the midst of the millet fields, as Carlo Alberto's hopes died down with the setting sun.

I sit in the moonlight with the old pack in my hands and the musket at my feet, thinking of all the dead years that seem to drift by me one by one as the clouds go by past the casement.

Some friends of mine break into the room, and find me there, the musket at my feet.

They are all breathless and excited talking of the news.

"You are not going, Pascarelli?" they cry to me.

I tell them yes.

"But you are mad!" they say in chorus.

I shrug my shoulders. It is very possible.

"But, with your fame?" they cry.

"Oh, altro! my poor paper laurels—a plaything for a Mardi Gras—what more?"

"But you will be ruined!" they urge.

"That is very possible, too."

"But just when you are great," they cry; "just when the world catches your words as if pearls fell from your mouth—to thrust that all away into a common soldier's knapsack—it is lunacy."

"That is as it may be. Italy wants Venice and Verona."

I rub the old cherry stains on the old knapsack, and think how strange it is that all we students dreamed of in the gloom of Pisa,—and were called mad and worse for so dreaming of as we marched twelve abreast by night through the sombre streets, chanting sonnets of Manzoni,—should now be come

and be coming to pass with a precision, and romance, that together make it like the work of magic.

They stay till the day breaks arguing with me—what is the use? The old musket lying there on the marble, seems to suit me better now than the painted bladder and gilded bells of the pantomime. To care for the follies of the carnival fair, one must have a heart as light as the bladder, and mirth that rings like the bells.

Well, I had these longer than most men. If the bladder be weighted with lead and the bells are jangled and out of tune now, at least my measure lasted longer than it lasts for most men.

At length my friends go away; they go sorrowful, and they think me a fool.

The chamber is black and grey around me. The dawn breaks, but breaks slowly.

I felt old to-day as I went by the shallow Grève water.

I felt weary as Astra laughed amongst the lilies.

How still it is!—here,—high amongst the roofs.

I am left alone in the chilly light of the dawn. The shadows are black on the marble floor. A mouse creeps up and smells at the musket where the blood of the dead soldier is crusted on the steel. The knapsack still lies on my knee. I think of Pisa.

How prettily and innocently jealous she was, the donzella, leaning out of the old grated window, because she had heard how, in the student days, the Zanzara had wound a red ribbon to my mandoline. Yet I remember too, how as we went underneath the old palaces, and spoke together of Margherita of France, she marvelled how the princess could wish to

wander with gipsies, and to leave all the pride and the pomp of her royalty for mere freedom and mirth and the fresh air of heaven. She marvelled, yes, though she had wandered with the Arte and me. She would not have been happy with us in other years; no doubt she is best as she is.

And yet,—does she never, I wonder, think of the hours when we went together through the trailing vines light of foot as of heart in the warmth of the sun?

Oh, those old fair dead days! they were so glad and so innocent and so simple. Why could they not last for ever beneath those blue Tuscan skies?

The city is still asleep.

The first chimes ring muffled through the shadows of night that still lingers. Good women will rise from their beds and will go out into the darkness of the churches, and will break their hearts in prayer over the sons and the lovers who are going out to war, on the old Lombard battle-fields, where the maize and the vine are green.

I have no one to pray for me.

It is always so, when one has loved too many. We gather the roses too quickly, and the wind blows the leaves away hither and thither, and our hands are left empty.

Well, the musket lies there; and, there is always Italy.

If the lute be broken and the fool's bells be jangled it is time to die as my fellow-students died amongst the trampled corn.

CHAPTER II.

Her Story.

Do you know Sta. Margharità's? the little brown square church with its bell clanging in the open tower, above in the sweet air on the hills?

There is level grass all about it, and it has a cool green garden shut within walls on every side except where a long parapet of red dusky tiles leaves open the view of the Valdarno; underneath the parapet there are other terraces of deep grass and old olive trees, in whose shade the orchids love to grow, and the blue iris springs up in great sheaves of sword-like leaves.

There are trees of every sort in the cloistered garden, the turf is rich and long, the flowers are tended with the tenderest care, the little sacristy glows red in the sun, an acanthus climbs against it; the sacristan's wife comes out to you plaiting her straw and brings you a cluster of her roses; you sit on the stone seat and lean over the parapet and look downward, birds flit about you, contadini go along the grass paths underneath, and nod to you, smiling; a delicious mingled loveliness of olive wood and ilex foliage and blossoming vineyards shelve beneath you; you see all Florence gleaming far below there in the sun, and your eyes sweep from the snow that still lies on Vallombrosa to the blue shadows of the Carrara range.

It is calm and golden and happy here at Sta. Margharità's, high on the fragrant hill air, with the gueldre roses nodding above head, and the voices of

the vinedressers echoing from the leaf-veiled depths below.

To live here and dream the years away and only score the time by the colour of the vines, it would be well, I think; very well. Only for such a life one must needs be so happy. Happy as one is for an hour, for a day, for a month, but never for longer. Happy as one can only be when a great passion is close about us, and is past, and present, and future, is world, and sun, and God.

Sometimes I come up here for quiet's sake and lean my arms on the red ledge, and wait to watch the sun sink down behind the deep azure of Carrara and change the broad green valley to a sea of molten gold.

I used to come here with Pascarel—many times, many times.

One day in especial I remember. The wooden Arte had been reared in the village yonder; it was a *giorno di festa*; it was in the April time; we came up along the narrow road between the high walls, overtopped with china roses and hawthorn; we came into the garden by the church and sat down, he on the parapet, I on the little stone bench in the corner under the aloë.

Mass was over; in the sacristan's house they were going to the mid-day meal; they brought food out to us and would take no denial. We shared the simple feast of soup and bread and salad, there amongst the green leaves and the flowers; we paid them for it with the mandoline and many songs of Florence.

We stayed there all the afternoon till the sun set, and we heard the Ave Maria ringing from all the

belfries in the valley as we strolled backward along the grass paths of the hills; he gathered the dainty orchids for me under the olive trees; we laughed and jested and made music as we went.

To-day the same scene lies before me in the sun; the old bell in the little square tower strikes the quarters with the same sound; the garden and the church are nowise changed; the sacristan's wife comes out smiling, plaiting her straw, and holding to me a little knot of flowers; she calls me the most illustrious, she gazes with gentle awe at the jewels on my hands; she does not look aged and her husband is stooping over the dark moist fresh-turned earth binding carnations just as we left him on that day.

It is just the same, just the same, only the music is silent.

Only!

I lean on the red edge of the wall and look down; two contadini go by under those old gnarled olives; they are young; he laughs and her cheeks grow red. I would give the world to be the girl, bareheaded there in the sun, poor, plaiting her straw as she goes along over the grass-grown furrows.

For the music is not silent for her. It may only indeed be a homely little pastoral song, only a peasant's stornello, rhymed to the hum of the spinning wheel and the bleat of the goats in the meadow. But it is the song that makes blythe her heart in the ragged bodice and light her feet in the ox-ploughed ways. It is perfect to her, and lips that are eager and tender murmur it low in her ear; she is blessed amongst women, I say. But to me the green earth silent.

Varkò, the painter, made my portrait the other day. I stood in the sunset one night in a court-dress that pleased him. He brought me an old trecentisto lute and asked me to sing him some Florence song as he worked. As I stretched out my hand the lute fell and broke in two on the marble floor. "Paint it so," I said to him; he did not know why, but so it seemed fittest to me.

And the lute is there on the picture, broken—beyond the cunning of men to mend. He calls the painting Giorgione's Mistress. It seems an ill-chosen name to me. For she must have been happy always; all that glad life in Venice that was one long golden flower-crowned masque, and then the short sharp death that did not divide them but wedded them closely for all time, together forever in the quiet of the grave and in the memory of the world.

It is so few years, and yet it seems so many ages since the white roses came to me in farewell.

There followed on that time a space of absolute unconsciousness. It is all blank, all dark to me.

When I awoke again there were no more around me the bare Florentine walls, the aromatic pungent Florentine odours, the gay vibrating Florentine street chatter. I saw no more the old carved window and the little brown figure of the stocking mender with the sun on her silver earrings and the silken hose at her feet.

It had all faded away as though it had never been.

I awoke with gold and silver and fine linen and rosy hues about me, I awoke with great wide windows before me, through which there gleamed gilded rails

and chesnut trees in blossom, and a light vivacious crowd of children, running hither and thither with lilac in their hands; I awoke with Florio's whispers in my ears.

"Oh, carina mia, you will live? you will live? Only see, this is Paris and we are so rich, so rich. If the donzella like to eat gold she can have it as easily as grapes in vintage time! Oh, carina mia, you will live, you will try a little to live, will you not?"

I looked at him stupidly, pushing the curls from my aching forehead; live? why should I live? the blue lilies were all dead in Tuscany.

One day they set before me great cases of sapphires and diamonds and other precious stones. They were heirlooms, they said.

"You are too young for them," said my father, "but they will become you, as those old yellow and purple velvets used to do in old Verona. Make yourself your handsomest to-night, the world will see you."

I had no choice but to obey.

The world saw me and made itself a fool for me: the great dazzling lawless world of Paris. I stretched my hands to it thankfully, it gave me a feverish forgetfulness; anything was better than to sit and see the chesnuts bud in the cool sunlight and to go mad with longing for the deep vine shadows and the sweet mountain stillness of my Tuscany. Anything was better than to stare till one was blind at the cruel glare on the shadeless pavements, and grow sick with longing for the mere smell of the oak wood fires in the Florence streets.

One day I saw an iris behind a gilded garden-pale; an iris as blue as my lost heavens—the iris of Dante that blooms in millions down the olive slopes and amongst the maize in Tuscany with the first wakening of the spring-time sun.

I thought that Dante in his hell had missed the sharpest torture of it all. Why did he not set a little Italian meadow lily to grow in the darkness of Caina and Ptolomea and smile with its azure eyes at the despair of those for whom the sun of Italy had forever ceased to shine?

Am I not mad? as mad as dead 'Dino's Pazza, calling on the waters to give up her lover by sad Ferrara? I call on the dead days, and they are drowned and mute like 'Dino.

My father is good to me, in his cold idle manner. He is proud because the world calls me so handsome, and he fills my hands with riches; I spend in a day when I like what would make this little paese on the hills here a fairyland for all its people. Men love me—or vow they do,—and I play with them, and they say I have no heart. Women envy me as I pass by, and hate me with that hate which is a woman's cross of honour. What more can any female creature want?

And yet you see one is so thankless. I, who dreamed ceaselessly of all this greatness, and thirsted for it lying wide-awake on my truckle bed, and watching the moon rise over the Scala's palaces, and light the painted loves of Orpheus on the vault above, I often shake the jewels off my aching head and fling myself down weeping as 'Dino's Pazza weeps beside the riverside, for the time when the wild poppies

were twisted in my wind-blown curls by the hands of Pascarel.

Many have asked me in marriage. My father looks at me with a curious look often and says, "Gather your roses while you may — that is sound counsel, though a poet's."

But how shall I gather them? I? who only hold a dead rose to my heart that no one sees, as old Giùdettà held hers fifty long years in silence and in faith.

I have no faith; if I had had faith, never had I let so poor and vile a thing as his dead amorous folly stand betwixt me and my belief in him. All that I know; too late, too late.

But so much faith as this I have. He kissed me there, on the dark hillside on the night of the saints under Fiesole. No other shall ever touch me; so much faith as this I have.

A woman who carries lips un-virgin to her husband, what better is she than the adulteress?

So I think at least; old Mariuccia would say so if I could rouse her from her hard-won rest away there where the alpine storm-winds lash the sullen sea-green of the Adige into foam.

There is one who torments me more than all others to be faithless to this single poor shred of human fealty that I treasure.

I have seen him but lately, since we came hither, back into this dear Tuscan land; it is he who in the old villa above Lucca begged me to sing to the mandoline with so insolent an eagerness in his bold eyes.

He is my father's cousin and heir; the likeness in

him that I saw that night was no chance resemblance. At times I wonder if he recognizes in me the child that leaned against the screen in the great hall with her strange masquerade dress of violet and gold: I cannot tell. He never talks of it; he is a man full of grace and courtliness, and to all people my father speaks of me as having been reared in a convent of Northern Italy. No one doubts: why should they? Only sometimes I think my cousin doubts; sometimes I think he knows full well that I was once the little wandering Uccello of the Arte.

He loves me, or pursues me at the least with a strong ardour and with delicate wiles and ways. My father favours his suit, so far at least as he ever rouses himself from his voluptuous apathy to urge upon me anything. The man is sole heir to all his late-come greatness and he would be glad that I should bear the mighty name and wear the honour of it always.

So they talk; so they talk; and my cousin woos me as only men skilled in the world as he is can; he has my father's beauty and my father's grace and ease; but I—whilst his words are most eloquent upon my ear, all I can hear is one voice murmuring in its sweet sonorous Tuscan, "Oh, gioja mia!" in the dreamy lustrous midnight when the falling stars dropped over white Fiesole.

For how can I forget? how shall I ever forget till I am dead?

What woman forgets the first kisses that have burned on her cheek and throat, unless she grow light enough and foul enough to lend her lips to fresh caresses? And that I am not;—nay, thank God;

—so much of womanhood there is in me, though in so much else, I, the great lord's daughter and the great world's darling, am so far sunk beneath the little simple wayward, fear-innocent less, Uccello.

Yet there must be something more, for in the world there where they sing my praises, they always say "a beautiful thing—but wild—and with an untamed look;" and when I shake off my rich velvets and my priceless laces at the end of the long nights of pleasure, I shiver a little, and in my soul long for the old simple dusty skirts stained with the juice of the trodden grapes, and the play of the bleating kids and the dew of the wind-blown acacias where I ran bareheaded and happy in the summer sun in the wake of the wandering Arte.

For I am so young still, and yet I feel so old; and all that one sweet buried summer time has all my dead youth with it in its grave of withered rose leaves.

"What would Mariuccia say if she came before us now!" cries good, merry, blissful Florio, a thousand times if once: ah, yes! I have all the greatness and the glories that I sighed my soul out for in my ungrateful babyhood, sitting at her feet under the broken Donatello. And what good is it to me? so little good that when I see a little white anemule shine under those olive trees my heart is sick with longing and I am weary unto death.

Is it three years? only three years? It seems eternity since there, by the Mouth of the Lion, the crowd of Oltrarno bore him away on the wild rejoicing night?

Men talk of him; I hear his name and see it on the walls of cities.

"A great genius," they say, "fitful and never to be controlled, but of wit keen as the needle's edge, and of powers varied as the sunset's hues." The fame of him has leapt into sudden light before the world; "a player's fame!" says my cousin with a sneer, "a player's fame! a mushroom's fungus growth that will die down with the first day of rain!"

Does he remember,—my cousin? When he says these things, I think so.

Can I be glad that he has those paper laurels, as he used to call them?

No, for art is a rival longer lived than any woman. Ah, dear heaven! I should have known that a woman's love is worth nothing unless it be doglike and takes good and evil alike uncomplaining? Yes, perhaps; but as it is my heart burns with love still.

Last night, only last night, I was weak enough to wish to see his face again there on the hillside where the great open-air theatre stands, and I left my horses at the base of the slope, and put my mask and domino on, and went upward on foot where the red and white flag fluttered high above the oak woods.

How still the night was; and the great golden moon hung in the silvery air, and the white magnolias gleamed like lamps, and a cloud of rosy oleander leaves was blown in my face by the wind.

Do you know what the night is in Italy? No? Then you do not know how near heaven your earth can be.

It is a great place without a roof, a summer theatre for the people. The grass grows up to the walls and the oak woods are all above. It was quite quiet; there

was a sound of dreamlike music sighing everywhere upon the silent and leafy sides of the hills.

There were many doors all open to the air. In one a group of pifferari leaned; next to them was a peasant girl with a bulrush in her hand; next her again a woman who rested her basket of melons on a rail and held a child to her bare breast.

Behind, the little wandering pifferari strayed near the entrance without paying, their eyes aglow under their tangled hair; the metal workers and perfume pressers and mosaic makers from the town leant together with bended brows; the noble stooped his delicate dark head to hearken yet more surely; the proud duchess at his side beat the measure softly with her broad black fan, so they listened, the Tuscan people, with the shadow of the great roofless walls around them and above their heads the blue night skies. And the genius of what they had heard had entered into them, and the sweet sounds of it were sighing in echo from all their mouths, and they laughed aloud in pleasure, while their eyes kindled and flashed through the shadow, and a great shout went up from three thousand voices to the quiet stars where the clouds were floating.

They all cried one name;—"Pascarèl!"

I glided in and stood in the press between a cobbler in his leathern apron who had brought a shoe to sew there and a contadino with his brown cloak tossed over one shoulder and behind his ear a knot of asphodels.

The light and shadows played about them; the oil flames burned clear, the smell of the fresh herbs and grass drifted from the hills without; above head were

the purple clouds with the moon a globe of gold, and a great dusky hawk winging his slow way across the face of the sky.

Ah, God! the familiar sweetness of it all! I lost all sense of time and place. I was once more the little wandering Uccello of the Arte, happy because the breeze blew, happy because the sun would rise, happy for every trifle of the day and night, happy as the flowers in the fields.

The people made a little way for me and I sank on the seat that the old cobbler rose to surrender to me. They looked but little at me, they were absorbed in what they had heard, and a woman masked is not so strange in Italy as elsewhere. I sat quite still.

The great circle went round and round before my sight, the lights wavered in the dusky shadows of it, the music sounded like the swell of some far-off sea.

Whether it were harmony or discord I had no perception, nor how long it lasted after my entrance there I cannot tell.

I could feel the wind blowing in my eyes, I could see the hawk hovering above with outstretched wings, I could smell the sweet familiar scents of the wild hillside; that was all.

My consciousness was with the old dead days.

The silence around me was broken by tumultuous shouts; the music had ceased, the people were sending the thunder of their applause up to the quiet darkness where the stars were; the hawk had soared away.

It was all vague and full of fury, like a storm, to me; the waves of sound beat on my ears but I did not hear them.

Then—lightly as a leopard in its own deserts, Pascarèl leaped on the stage with a bound, and thunders of homage echoed through the house, and his eyes flashed over the sea of faces and the clear resonant vibrations of his voice thrilled through the murmuring welcome of the hushing house.

And so I saw and heard him—I—once more; I who had felt his kisses there on the far hillside beneath Fiesole that unforgotten night before the Feast-day of the Dead.

And yet I sat quite quiet, and only drew a little into shadow where the gaslight would not find my diamonds. Women are liars, say you? Well, they need be.

There was silence, tumult, silence, tumult again; then the people streamed away out into the moonlight.

I was left all alone. I could hear them going down the hills playing on their mandolines. The lights were blown out. There was only the white light of the full moon.

Near at hand there was laughter and singing. They sounded strangely, waking all the echoes in the great silent amphitheatre. My life thrilled with sharp sickly pain, as though a snake had bitten me.

I heard the clear vibration of the laugh of Pascarèl, that Italian laugh, like the ring of silver upon stone, which is like no other upon earth. The light merriment of women crossed it, and a burden of a love song followed.

I rose to my feet, and felt my way blindly through the rows of seats to the open doorway, round which

the coils of wild vine were blowing in the wind from the mountains.

He was standing on the hillside; his lips laughed, the moonlight fell about him; his mandoline was slung with a scarlet ribbon; against him leaned a beautiful wanton thing with laces trailing in the damp grass, and a white hand that stretched over his shoulder and touched the strings of the lute.

I knew her face; she came of Venice; they called her in her world Poppea.

I went by them, noiseless and shapeless, a dark shadow against the white magnolia blossoms. He started, and a false note shivered sadly from the mandoline.

This was how he remembered! Ah, God! what is it that stays with me still?—it cannot be love—for very shame's sake it must now be hate!

And yet,—and yet,—I envy that peasant girl who goes yonder through the olives with her lover's hand in hers!

CHAPTER III.

The old Sea Queen.

It is not an army that goes out to war. It is a whole people that rises in arms. My birth country alone sends out many thousand Tuscans; all made of the same steel as those who, in the old day held their villa on the Murello slopes there, against all assaults from the stoutest chivalry of England and of Germany.

I come down to Genoa in the fresh May days; along this beautiful sea road that my knapsack and

I travelled so long long ago with the French comedians, eating their cherries and singing their songs, with the blue sky overhead and the blue sea at their feet.

I remember how we came into Genoa then—they and I—in the glad Easter weather, with the white dust on our feet and the ready jest on our mouths. Genoa was in festà that day; and all the ladder-like streets were ablaze with flags, and all the many-coloured flints of the old sea palaces glowed in the fervid noon heats from the sapphire water. And we ate fruits in the quaint old galleries along the sea line; and laughed and chattered down the steep ways where the Doria and their fellows fought so often, knee to knee and knife to knife; and then, at nightfall, we played to a thousand odd sailors and traders of every clime from off the vessels in its harbour, and the theatre over and done with, we strayed out into the moonlight along the sea again, slaking our throats with pomegranates, and waking the echoes of the palaces of the old Sea Queen with the thrill of the mandoline until the dawn broke away there across the waves where Africa was lying.

Ah, Dio mio!—those were goodly days, and gracious in their folly, and sweet in the mouth as the red water melon, if also as swift to melt away and leave no taste, and as little fit for life's real sustenance.

And here is Genoa again in the May time, and this time its music is of drums and bugles, and the roll of cannon and the tramp of soldiers; this May time its waters and skies and air are grey, and full of storm; the rain falls, the shadows of the hills close darkly round; the old palaces lean together, and the

streets are dark as night; there are only the golden oranges and the tricoloured banners that have colour in them, and laugh a little through the gloom.

The city seems to tremble where she sits by the sea, that she wrested in the old old days from bereaved Pisa.

Through her streets and down her mighty quays there tramp, all day long, thousands and tens of thousands of tired feet—all Italy and half France are here.

Through the mists that hang on high, over the olive woods, there come half muffled cheers. Though the rain falls the bouquets fall too; fall in showers on the shining lines of bayonets from the balconies above. Through the white vapour from the Mediterranean the sounds of the salutes from the frigates roll heavily and echo down the mole. The old archways and the dim cavernous galleries along the sea line are all full of the troops, that pause there in a little breathing space to taste the wine and press the fruits into their burning throats. Little children glow here and there out of the fog like little knots of flowers; the smallest of them have the three colours somewhere on their dress, and their small shrill voices are all crying vivas for the King and Italy.

Genoa is for the moment the mouthpiece of the whole roused nation.

The rain falls—falls all day long; and at night dims the cressets and clusters of lights that glitter down the terraces in the old palaces, and puts out the broad flame of torches that glow down the terraces and flare on the sculptured fronts and the varicoloured carvings in all the sloping streets. The rain falls as

though the sky were sold to Austria. But for once it cannot drive the people in; for once, though the flags droop, the hearts do not: for once the eager steps race, and the loud huzzas rise, and the millions of flowers are thrown through the grey sad mist as through the lost gold of the sunshine.

The clouds may gather and the storms may beat as they will, and do their worst; there is a fire alight in Italy that no rain can quench;—nay, not even a rain of blood.

Genoa for the moment is the meeting place of the whole roused nation.

I sit here in the covered places in the galleries fronting the sea.

It is full of many-coloured fruits, and flasks of wine, and piles of polenta. Oil-lamps swing above, shedding a dim light. A handsome brown-faced woman chaffers at the counter, her great gold earrings flashing with each movement of her head. Soldiers come and go by scores, by hundreds; Zouaves with the African sun on them, Neapolitans still in their fishing shirts; Tuscan conscripts with the first down on their lips; Cuirassiers with flashing chains and plumes; Italian nobles with Titian faces and slender stately forms in the simple tunic of the volunteer, all coming and going, drinking and jesting, clashing their sabres against the great brass scales, tilting the straw covered flasks to their mouths, tossing their sashes against the baskets of oranges, making, all unwittingly, a thousand studies for Meissonnier, with the dusky light on the white crosses of Savoy and the silver medals of France, whilst out there, beyond the quay, the

sea is murmuring, and the vessels are looming like phantom ships in the shadows.

The French laugh and chatter endlessly, and our people will not be outdone in lightness of heart; but every now and then the Italian faces grow very grave and pale a little under their olive brows as their eyes go seaward; here it is not a question of a campaign lost or won, it is a nation's life or death that is in the balance.

I have come from the Caffè of the Concordia.

It is grander there and stiller amongst its orange groves and throngs of staff officers; but I like better to be here in this dusky archway with my musket at my knee, and, around, the strong salt smell of the sea.

As I sit here thinking thus, there comes noiselessly into the crowded place a slight small figure, travel-stained and very weary, with a beautiful pale little face under curls of reddened gold. The figure comes to me shyly through the noisy soldiers, and takes my hand.

"Dear friend, am I too late? May I go with you?"

It is Raffaellino.

For a while I cannot speak to him, I am so much amazed. I left him safe in Florence with his genius, in the quiet and the sunshine, springing to goodly stature like the prophet's gourd.

"You!" I cry to him, making way for him on the window settle. "You;—Merciful heaven, you? to face this war? We shall have women and children next!"

It is brutal of me, but I am rough with him. I

am angered to see him there; a lad no stronger than any reed that blows in Arno water.

"The women and the children will arm, I think, if the men fail," he said, with a gentleness that shames me. "Did you not say yourself—it is not an army; it is a nation in arms?"

I sit silent; I cannot chide him for any love that he bears to Italy, but in my heart I think that the first hour's march under the summer sun under his knapsack will stifle the life and music in him, as a stone will crush a skylark.

As the oil flames flicker in the wind I see that he is very pale, paler even than is his wont.

"Can we not go elsewhere?" he murmurs to me. "It is so full of noise here, and the smell of wine so strong. And I have a thing to tell you!"

It is hard to find quiet in Genoa that night. Every house is full of feasting soldiers, and all along the streets there come bands of them singing and clanking down the precipitous old world ways.

The rain has lifted a little; there is only a sea mist; I go along the mole with him, and when we have got a little away from the clamour we sit down in the shadow of an old boat that is high and dry there up on the flags. The rain does not touch us; and we have the sea in front, with a captured schooner of Galatz at anchor in the gloom.

Then Raffaellino turns his shining eyes on me, and his eager voice trembles.

"Oh, dear friend, she is living after all! I have seen her, I have spoken with her—there in Florence—and she was in the Arte that night and we never knew!"

The grey sea eddies and heaves before my sight. For a moment the schooner's solitary light flashes out of the darkness like a million suns. The ground grows unsteady beneath my feet.

I have no need to ask him whom he means.

The boy leans his head on his hands, silent; the wind blows in from the sea; the lights in the captive ship die out; from the terraces above, where the hills are, there comes a loud sweet echo of men's voices singing; they are chanting the Hymn of Garibaldi.

Then——

"Your donzella?" I say quietly, for it is her secret and must be kept, and the lad knows nothing. "Your donzella? Well! she is not dead, then. But she is dead, no doubt, in another fashion—by all kinds of change."

He looks at me a little bewilderedly. Perhaps I speak too coldly—men do when they are in pain.

"She is changed, and yet she is not," he murmurs; "a hundred times more beautiful, yet quite the same, I think, as when we ran together through Verona. But she is very great, you know—very great and rich, and of high estate, and her own mistress. Changed so; but not in any other way. I think, except——Well, a great countess, you know, and a poor child singing in the Carnival for bread, they are so wide asunder. Yes, you are right—change is a sort of death. Perhaps a sadder one for those it leaves."

"She is married greatly?" I say to him. The words have no sense or reason to me as I say them. I think of my child with the loose golden cloud of her hair blowing in the fresh hill winds, and her hands full of the purple glory of the wild anemones as she

came down on the day of the Saints towards the old brown Badià.

I lost her, as one may miss a firefly in a myrtle thicket, one hot June night, in the Florence gardens, and I find her as one may find it another night, set to shine on high in a woman's hair in the palace of a Florence duchess.

The firefly, gathered to play the part of a diamond, and gleam in a palace masque, dies of the honour; the little soul goes forth in fire like other souls of greater martyrs; but what woman ever died of exaltation? They leave such thankless follies to the lúcciole.

It cannot be a second ere he answers me, but it seems a horrible endless space and silence that follows on my own voice; the noise from the city and from the sea blending into a strange dull roar that surges at my ear.

"She is not wedded," says the boy, at last, and my heart leaps like a loosed deer that springs from hunters' nets to woodland liberty—and yet what can it be to me?—to me more than to any one of those careless lads in the streets up yonder, who will find his grave in the ripening wheat of the wide Lombard fields? "No! It is some great title of her father's. Our folk call her *contessa*, because he is now so noble. I do not know much. I did not listen. I could only think of her. There was some wondrous change of fortune for them—she did tell me, I forget. She was in the *Arte* that night and—then she saw me in the street and sent for me, and I went—it was the day you left,—she had the great villa under *Sta. Margharità* on the hill. I went, in courtesy and wonder, to

a stranger as I thought, not dreaming—then, when she stretched her hands to me, and cried, ‘Ino, Ino!—is Verona all forgotten?’ she laughing a little, and yet weeping too, then I knew her, though it was all so changed, and I fell at her feet, and I forget the rest.”

After that he is silent a long time—poor little tender Raffaellino.

I am silent too.

The rain falls faster, and the wind drives against the boat, but neither he nor I heed that.

As for me I do not ask another thing. He has seen her, and the world has gone by just the same,—and she is there in my own city,—and I am here a common soldier with my musket, bound in honour not to turn back and look upon her face. For we are to march at dawn.

I sit still looking into the grey mist of the waters; in the town they are shouting and gathering and singing and drinking, and all the lines of the palaces and streets glitter in zigzags of light fretfully through the fog, but no one disturbs us under the black shadow of the old fishing boat.

Raffaellino, after a time, speaks again, his head still bent upon his hands.

“I do not think she is changed at heart,” he murmurs. “The same generous, imperious, tender, wilful, capricious thing, I think, that used to run with me in the winter snows and the summer noons, hungry and happy, about in old Verona. She laughed and wept with me; she forgot all her greatness,—she called me her brother, her playmate, her friend—she, a princess, as it were, in the north land of her father’s. She is a proud, graceful, noble woman now,—a little haughty

of speech and swift in scorn, I fancy, but to me most tender. 'Oh, 'Ino!' she cried, 'if only I were now that merry, naughty, wayward child that ran with you in the old carnival days amongst the merry people!' And then I think she would have fairly wept—only she turned her head and was too proud—but there went a sort of shiver over her, like that which shakes the glacier just before it falls."

I let the boy talk on, the broken phrases of his speech filled in with the fall of the rain, and the sough of the sea in the harbour. I ask no questions. I seem to know it all.

"It was late in the day when I saw her," he goes on after a pause. "She made me stay the evening with her. She lives like an empress. We went out into the gardens as the sun set. Then she would hear my story. Did ever you see her in the world, I wonder?"

I look straight at the sea, and answer "Never,—Why?"

If one be a man, and have a shred of honour, one must lie so often; so seldom is there any other way that serves a woman.

"Only, because, when I spoke of you, and without you I should have no story, she grew quite pale, I thought, and listened with a strange look in her eyes. And when I told her how you had kept me with you all these years, and won your gold and fame for me; her tears fell into a knot of oleanders that she held, and she murmured to herself, 'So like him!—Oh, God—so like!' And when I asked her if she knew you, then she turned all coldly and suddenly, and answered, '—I know what the world says

of him, no more—a great genius—wild and generous—what can he see in those laughing painted women? But they say he loves such best.’ And then she would hear no more of you, and then she would hear of nothing except of you; and when she asked if you were still in Florence she trembled, or I thought so—perhaps it was only the flicker of the trees, for it was twilight then—and when I said that you had thrown up fame and fortune, and gone off to join the troops at Genoa, she flashed on me her great proud starry eyes with such a scorn—it scorched me like a flame—Ah, heaven! I shall see till I die. ‘And you wait here!’ she cried, ‘you let him go alone! You!—who but for him would have died in the Florence streets of hunger like a dog!’ She did not know how much she hurt, nay, I am sure she did not mean to hurt at all. I murmured something of the only strength I had lying in music. But her eyes flashed fire on mine, though they still were dim. ‘What!’ she cried, ‘does genius then claim cowardice as its first privilege and exemption? It was not Lelio Pascarel who taught you that!’ She did not mean to hurt—oh, no! she never meant to hurt at all. That I am certain. But only spoke out her quick proud passionate thought as was her habit when a little child. But one would not wait to hear a woman say that twice. And she was right too, very right, I know. I left her very soon, and said that I would go to her again. She gave me both her hands, in our sweet frank Italian fashion,—she is not changed in any thing of that; I kissed them, and I left her. And when the morning came, I offered myself for service with the volunteers, and they took me, though I am weakly and girlish,

as you say, and they gave me the rough dress and the heavy musket, and I came to-day to Genoa with a thousand others. I shall be of little use; but she was right, you know. If one can only die—one ought at least die for Italy.”

So she cannot have forgotten that sweet year long Tuscan summer?

And it was she masked on the hillside that night; and I—I laughed like a fool with Astra and Poppea. What could she think but that I loved those “painted women?” Ah, heaven! how sweet that jealous word to me!

Nay—I know how base my joy is.

What right have I to be glad that my memory lies like a deep evening shadow across the brilliancy of the morning of her life?

Of course she cannot forget.

What woman forgets kisses that have burned upon her lips, unless she grow light enough and base enough to lend her lips in loves swift-chosen and quick changed?—and that she will never grow to be my proud innocent lost treasure.

I know that gladness is base in me.

Yet glad I am—fiercely, madly, heedlessly glad, though I sit mute here by the sea, and listen with a cold face lest the lad should think any thought that may come near the truth. For all I can ever do in this world for my darling now is to keep her secret for her—better than she would keep it for herself, perhaps, if she be indeed so little altered.

After awhile, Raffaellino looks up at me wistful, “Are you angered with me that I come?—you are so still. One could not let a woman say that twice.”

"That is as one may feel," I answered him, roughly. "If you did not fight for the sake of Italy, what use to fight for the gibe of a woman?"

It is brutal in me, I know that, but I cannot sit quietly here and hear him talk of her. I rise from the boat's rest and shake him a little as he leans with his head upon his hands.

"Dio! you are wet through. Do you want to die before you see a battlefield? Get up; you have done folly enough for one day's work."

He gets up, as I bid him; there is a startled pain in his eyes that moves me with remorse for wounding him.

I laugh a little that he may see no change in me.

"Nay, 'Ino, you were my nightingale, and belong to me; I am angered to see you come to be shot down with all the sparrow-hawks and vultures. A girl might as well stay a breach with her slender arm as you come out to feed the cannon. Besides, the music in you! You should have had pity on your genius—"

"It was not by pity on their genius that your Florentines made Florence great in the old days you love," he murmured. "And, on your own, what pity have you had?"

"Mine! Oh, altro! A trick of imitating any other creature that I see; and being able to play a little with words upon the hearts of a people who laugh or cry without knowing why when I tell them! A fine thing. But you—who speak in music, that is the very voice of God Himself amidst men!—Well, now you are here you cannot turn back. We must do our best for you. Rise up, and come out of this wild

weather. If you would serve Italy, you must keep your strength."

A gleam of moonlight from a rift in the clouds falls on his face as he lifts it.

"If they kill me, it does not matter," he said softly. "You know I have loved the donzella ever since we sang together in my father's workshop amongst the clank of the hammers; and always, wherever I wandered, I thought of finding her; and always, when I have dreamed of my music, I have heard her voice as it used to sound in the still old square in the summer nights; and when they praised my music, and talked of a great future for me, I thought to myself, perhaps she is in pain and in poverty somewhere, or even perhaps in shame, and I shall lift her up and crown her with my crown, and give her all that men give me; but now it is over—all over for ever! And now she is set on high there, and she can never be anything ever again to me; and I feel as if I should never bear to hear a note of music; and my music was all my soul, you know. And it is dead."

Ay, indeed, I know; know but too well. When you can solace a mother for her first-born's death, then, and then only, shall you solace an artist for the death in him of his Art.

Then the lad rises up and walks a little feebly along the grey sea line: and we go in silence—perfect silence, backward into the heart of the town.

The rain has lifted a little. The fires of torches and of illuminations light the grim stone heights of the old palaces; we tread on laurels as we mount the steep and crowded streets; from the terraces, where

the orange boughs toss in the wind, distant voices come chanting still the "Fuori il Stranier!"

Raffaellino turns to me a moment with his tender pale face in a sudden glow from the warmth of the reddened lights in a gallery above.

"You hear them?" he says, softly. "Nay, she was right—so right. What can one ask better than to lay down one's life for Italy?"

CHAPTER IV.

In the Land of Virgil.

It is not an army, I say, that goes out to war, it is a nation in arms that sweeps across the Mincio to grapple with the old hereditary foe. When one heart beats in the million breasts of a nation, the nation is invincible. Man cannot hurt her, and God will not.

Every square inch of this soil, through whose golden harvests the child Virgil once ran with fleet feet chanting strophes to the great Ceres Mammosa, has been thrashed through and through by the iron flail of man for twice a thousand centuries.

The struggle is so old, so old—older than the old iron crown of Lombardy. Down from the dreary fastnesses of the Dolomite, the imperial eagle has swooped so many times to fasten beak and talons in the fair eyes of our Italia.

Against the empire! It is the old old war-cry.

No doubt it was grander work going out across the green Valdarno, with the red Carroccio and the milkwhite oxen, and the banners of the Silver Dove and the Silver Temple; no doubt it was grander; but perhaps we are not altogether unworthy our forefathers

as we toil through the hot sun and the blinding dust, with the mosquito in our flesh, and the regulation knapsack heavy on our shoulders. One is only a volunteer; but still, if one does one's best——

The other day, after a toilsome march, some of us bivouacked in sight of Mantua; our arms were stacked, and our tents set up where there were old grey crumbled ramparts just on the very edge of the lake. Some young soldiers, who were students from Ravenna and comrades of mine, cared for such old things, and spent their leisure in tracking out the line of the fortifications beneath the rank grass and the wild tulip roots that grew so thickly beside the water, where the castello with its village clustering beneath it had stood in the bygone times of Bonacolsi and Avvocati. And amongst other marks and sculptures on the fallen stones they found most often a prince's coronet, and two hawks fighting, and dates of that old old time, when the Lake-city yonder, in the midst of its melancholy waters, had quivered under the velvet hands in their gloves of steel of Beatrice and Matilda.

I said nothing to the lads as they scraped the grass away with their swords off the crown and the two hawks, but I knew the cognizance well, it had been carven in many a razed fortress and ruined town over the Tuscan fields and the Aquilean marches, in the sign manual of the Pascarelli. If I had had all those old fiefs and that crown, perhaps;—poof! it was the first time that I had ever wished for them. But the Fates lie like lead on my heart,—mine; to whom the three grim Parcæ had ever been up to that time of the Feast of the Dead only only as three gladsome

maidens that only summoned me to dance whilst they sang.

As it is, I go the next day into Alessandria, and an officer, seeing me, and wanting his horse held, throws me the bridle, with a word of command.

I walk up and down with the horse over an hour. When the general comes out of the house he had entered he looks over me with a steady glance: "A volunteer?"

I salute, and assent.

"What do you get?" he asks.

"A musket and twenty-five centimes a day."

"You are a noble?"

"No."

"What then?"

"A vagabond."

He smiles and throws me, instead of the bridle, a soldo, and so rides away. I keep the coin.

A copper coin for holding a horse; well, the Pas-carèllo Princes in their graves there, under the ruined fortress, could not be ashamed.

In its way that copper coin is worth the ducal crown.

It is fierce and dark work here in this fruitful land of Virgil. The world has got so tired; it has seen so much of heroism and carnage; it has grown old and dull, and would scarcely open its drowsy ears at a noble deed, though the note of it were loud as that bugle blast of Orlando which made the birds drop dead in all the forests of Roncesvalles.

Else the world has seldom seen anything finer than this fiery torrent of national life rushing to the plains of the Mincio as fast and as furiously as Mincio

in time of flood can rush from her Mother of Garda. The noble fights beside the populano. The young marquis leaves his marble villa, as the cobbler his board at the street corner. The prince strides through the millet, shoulder to shoulder with the coppersmith and the mosaic-maker. This is the reason that we are so strong in this summer-season; strong as a chain of which every link has been proved in the fire.

The men who march and fight with me have laughed and frolicked with me a thousand times in the masquerades and sweetmeat showers of the Carnival, and I can do them some little good. Even Italians find it hard to raise a jest sometimes, plodding through the rain-soaked earth in autumn with only a muddy blood-stained brook to drink at, and the ants settling by the score in the gaps of half-healed wounds. Even Italians feel their hearts a little heavy, straining under the weight of rifle and knapsack over the parched ground in the scorch of noon, with comrade after comrade falling out of the ranks from sunstroke, and the mosquitos buzzing horribly where the sword-slash is still unclosed. I can do some little good, perhaps, raising their courage with a strain of Leopárdi or Giusti, or taking them back to their village under the vines by some burden of a country-ritornella, sweetening their hard black bread with a tale out of Boccaccio, and making them forget their ague on the marshy ground by some one of the infinite jests in the old comedies, of which my brain is full, and their ears are never tired.

I strive to keep up my mirth for their sakes;—at night lying round the fires that we light to keep off the marsh fever, or by day tramping along the dry,

white, tiresome roads with the clouds of gnats at our parching throats.

But it is hard to do it, sometimes. War is sickly work at its best; and life, I say, is weary. So it seems to me as I go to-day—alone, for once,—through the smiling country where the maidens pluck the mulberry leaves as though no such things as flame and steel were as near them as the vines are near.

My heart is heavy as I pace between the lines of olives and watch the runlets of water glisten in the grass.

Poor little Toccò has died here.

He volunteered with me, poor dear little lad, only seventeen then, and merry as a lark; leaving the bottega and the work he loved, and the fun and frolic of the Florentine street life; and in the very heart of Magenta, as we marched through the standing corn, under the hail of iron, a bullet struck him, and he fell.

I could not stay to see for him then; the sea of blood swept me away, a league away, as it seemed, in a second, and all the day long it was as much as we could do to keep our feet amidst that trampled wheat under that fierce red sun.

But when old Mars, who ever loved Florence, had turned the balance in our favour, and the carnage was over and done, and the sun was gone down westward, there beyond the Apuleian Alps, then I had time to seek for him, and after long search I found him; one amongst so many other simple brown-eyed lads in their rough coats of blue, and their little peaked caps, and their straps and their belts, lying torn and crushed and nameless and forgotten, down there amongst the summer harvest.

He was not quite lifeless.

He took a drop of water, and lifted his eyelids, and smiled; he knew me, though it was quite night, and he was nearly dead.

"It is a great thing—to die for Italy," he said gently, with a light like morning on his little parched sad face; then a shiver shook him, and his hand tried to fold itself in mine, and he stretched his limbs out, and all was over.

He was only a sod of clay that cumbered that harvest field.

Ah, Dio mio!—the world is weary after all.

I go through the green glad country.

Who could tell that death in its most ghastly shapes walked here with every day and night?

It is all so peaceful.

The white road runs straight and shining in the sun. The red roofs of the farmhouses glow through chestnut woods and olive orchards. The mighty river glistens here and there where a break in the vines shows its course. Away in the shadows are the towers of Pavia; and, beyond, the beautiful snowy sea-like surge of the Alpine crests where Milan lies. Near me girls are putting mulberry leaves into great baskets, chatting the while; and through the vineyards gentle white oxen drag the lumbering waggons.

Only now and again there is some headless helmet in the grass, or the dogroses blossom above a dead warhorse; or a cherry tree, red with fruit, lies on the ground, its stem broken under a rain of bullets.

I walk on, and think of another sad thing that I saw yesterday.

It was by the wayside in a little village. There

had been a short sharp struggle between Tirolese, who held the street, and Bersaglieri who wanted to sweep it clear. The Bersaglieri won, and carried the position. The little narrow road all green and golden with fruit trees, where the women were wont to sit out at their thresholds at evening spinning and singing in unity, was strewn with dead and dying.

I had helped the Bersaglieri—being in the way; and when all was over tried to help the wounded.

I carried one Tirolean into a cottage. He was a tall, strong, and very handsome man; a mountaineer; and he had been shot through the head, and had but half an hour to live.

I soothed that half-hour for him as well as I was able; he lying on the mud floor of the hovel with the door wide open, and through it shining the glory of the afternoon sun, and the whiteness of a late flowering peach-tree. He had been unconscious since the time the shot had struck him; before death his reason came to him—it is often so.

His hand sought his chest feebly and uncertainly, like the hand of a blind man.

“Do not take it away,” he muttered, with his wistful beautiful frank eyes looking with passionate prayer into mine—his enemy’s. “Do not take it away—it is all I have. She laughed, you know—but she did not mean to hurt—oh, no, oh, no. Look at that white—is that snow? We must bring the cattle down from the mountains. Yes—I am in pain; a little pain. Do not tell my mother—nor Anton. Lift me a little, so I can see the hills—she laughed, you know, but then she did not mean to hurt. Do not take it away—it is the only little thing I have.”

And so gazing at the whiteness of the fruit blossoms in the open door, and thinking it the lustre of the virgin snow upon his own eternal hills, he shuddered a little and turned wearily on his side, and so looking up at me like a dog in pain, drew his breath with a sigh and died.

When we stript to bury him his right hand was on his chest, and on it was a little tuft of the wild grass that is called the maiden's hair.

We laid him to rest in the little garden under the fruit trees, with his face turned to his own mountains.

His name I never knew.

His is one of the many million nameless graves that strew all that green country betwixt Alp and Apennine. But I have no doubt that if it could be known we should find it to be—Marco Rosas.

Away in a chalet of Unterinnthal the good mother will sit and spin and pray; and the cattle will come from the grass lands in autumn, and the sun and the clouds will play on the broad snow fields, and the calves will low at the barred byre door, and the seasons will come and go till the Alps are once more smiling blue as the eyes of a northern child, with the gentian flowers and the hyacinths of the spring.

But always in vain will the old mother pray, and never again will the feet of her first-born come over the mountains.

CHAPTER V.

The Song of the Grilli.

I HAVE kept the dear little Raffaello beside me as much as possible.

Every soul treats him tenderly, as if he were a girl. There are hundreds of lads as young as he; but there is something in his pretty innocent face with its curls of Giorgione's gold, and its clear, wondering, wistful eyes that wins the heart out of the toughest veteran and wildest trooper.

The boy looks so astray in it all.

His soul is in music. This thunder of cannonade, and screams of dying horses, and clash of crossing steel, and falling trees and burning houses, must be a hell to him. He has always a startled look.

Yet he is brave in his way, this little dreamer, who only the other day was a barelegged child, singing while the robins sang in the garret of Ambrogio Ruffi.

He is brave in his way, though he clings so closely to me, and will hardly quit my shadow.

One day I found him hidden by the high yellow corn, listening—listening—listening with an intent and wondering face. I spoke and roused him, and forced him away; for a battery of the Austrians commanded these very fields, and their fire was raking through the bending wheat not ten yards off him.

"What were you doing there?" I asked him in some wrath.

"I was hearing what the grilli said," he answered me; and then he got out his little trecento viol which lies always in his knapsack; and began to echo out on it the story of the grilli; the little brown grilli singing so happily here in joy of the sun and the summer, amongst the yellow corn stalks and the flame of the tossing poppies; the poor little grilli caged for Christ's sake on Ascension Day, and singing still on

and on in the little prisons till their life grows out of them, whilst every hut and homestead on the olive hills and in the vine-lands sets bread and wine on its threshold and hangs out a lanthorn to guide the steps of Christ who walks that night on earth.

Raffaellino played the plaint of the grilli that day, whilst a score of rough soldiers stood round, he nothing noting them, and not a few of them had their fierce eyes dim with tears. Then all in a moment he broke it off suddenly, and thrust the viol behind him, and went away by himself into the little bare plaster cottage, where a dozen of us were quartered.

When I followed him he was crying like a child.

"What is it?" I asked him.

He hid his face shyly, as a girl may do.

"Only—only—I have loved my music for itself, you know, and it was quite enough for me. But now I do not know—I think the things and feel them, and I can make others feel them too, but all the harmony is gone out of it for me. In all I do, I only see her face, I only hear her voice. My music is like the grilli's in the cage; it is my nature—and so it will not leave me—only I am faithless to it, so I die. She will never be anything to me, you know; how should she? great like that, and I a little beggar? Oh, I know, I know it is my folly; but you see in old Verona she had no one else but me, and so——"

And so the gentle heart of the little lad is half broken; a childish love and as innocent as ever this impure earth ere saw, but still one that has killed art in him, and made the adder of memory hiss in every sweet note that was once his solace.

He is no more fit for the fiery furnace of war than

are those delicate heads of the millet, that blow like a girl's auburn curls upon the summer wind. Nevertheless, the battle does not spare the frail maize feathers, but sweeps them aside, and treads them down, and tramples them in blood. Nor does it spare Raffaellino.

The next day after he has listened to the grilli's chaunt in the cornfields, there is bitter struggle over all this fertile smiling land, with its festooned vines and its leaf-hidden watercourses, that is like one vast sheet of verdure enrolled between the far mountains.

It is a struggle that is called, later on, the Field of Montebello.

"We go in black with powder; we shall come out red with carnage," says one of its soldiers, and it is true that we do. We dip the scarlet lilies of Florence and the white cross of Savoy in blood till they are both of one colour. We strangle the black eagle that day, down there amongst the tangled vines and the full-eared corn in the country of Virgil.

It is a hot and blinding day.

The sun lies heavily on all the white roads. The bruised vines, and trodden corn, and ruined orchards, are sad to see.

At intervals here and there, on the green face of the country, there are dusky clouds of smoke and dark small masses slowly moving. There is a battle scattered over the great plain. The fine ethereal lines of the mountains are delicate as gossamer against the summer sky. So they looked when Theodoric and Otho fought here. They have seen so many millions of men slaughter one another here, since the far ages when men were not, and all this laughing land of the

vine and the pomegranate was only a primæval valley of ice.

How the battle goes elsewhere I cannot tell. Where I am, we hold a villa and its courts and gardens against the Austrians.

It is a rambling old place, with great walled gardens, and great echoing chambers, and great discoloured frescoes peeling in the sun. Its owners have fled long before.

There is only an old man, a gardener, who sits by a well in the central court while the struggle goes on round him, and stares and looks stupid, as though his wits were gone.

God knows how we fight—I do not. There are some fifty of us and a handful of Bersaglieri—that is all; and the Austrians are very numerous. They held the position early in the day, and we took it from them at noon; and we have held it against the worst that they can do until it is now four by the sun-dial on the wall where the great mulberry grows and a cherub's head is painted.

The musketry rolls; the smoke is thick; the dead men fall down the broad stone steps, and lie under the red oleander flowers. The staircase is disputed step by step. The pavements are all wet with blood. The din is horrible. Amidst it all I know I hear, in a moment of stillness, a little bird singing. I look up and see it above my head, on a tendril of a vine that comes through the large unglazed window.

There is a young face lifted to listen to it. It is innocent and heavenly looking, like the cherub's on the frescoed wall. It is terribly out of keeping with the ghastly scene around. It is quite white, even to

the lips; but they are firmly closed, although so pale, and Raffaellino has not left my side to-day.

The sun-dial points four in the afternoon.

We have looked for reinforcement, but none comes. How the battle goes elsewhere we cannot tell. The enemy are strong here still and keep pressing upward through the courts and gardens.

All the later half of the bitter burning day our own men seem to close round me, and look up to me as their leader. I do not think how or why it is—whether all those in command are dead or not. I lead them because it comes naturally—I, a mere volunteer, a common soldier, like the rest of them, with nothing but my musket.

As the bird sings, and a little lull comes in the strife, as such a pause will, even in the fiercest struggle, I look around me anxiously. My clothes have been shot through and through, but, strangely enough, nowhere is the flesh grazed or the bone broken. Yet men have fallen round me like chestnuts in the autumn forests.

We are very few.

However the day go elsewhere in the plain, here it goes against us.

Jägers have joined the Whitecoats, and are pressing up through the ilexes.

We hold the staircase and the inner court still;—but for how long?

If I could send word to the head of the bridge, a mile off, the Sardinians are there, and might spare men. Raffaellino, watching my face, in that one little moment as the bird sings, reads my thoughts, and whispers to me through the din—

"If I crept through the laurels and ran, the poplars would shelter me; once by the river-side, to the bridge is not far?"

I do not answer him.

The lad is dear to me. Did I not see him first, the pretty child, touching his little viol that carnival day in the cathedral square where grim Roland keeps watch and ward?

The passage to the bridge is possible; but whosoever makes it—being seen—will surely meet his death. For all the way is set thick with Tirolese, who mark their men as on the hills they mark their chamois.

"No, it is too dangerous," I say to him abruptly. "No; I forbid you."

Raffaellino lifts his golden head; the sun coming through the open window makes an aureola round it. A little feverish flush comes on his cheeks.

"And I—disobey you!" he said quickly. "Even before you—Italy!"

And then he runs out swiftly, and through the window I see him in the open air, and then I lose him underneath the leaves, and have only space to breathe for him that half-unconscious prayer which the most reckless men will cling to by an instinct; for the lull is over, and the Jägers are in the inner court, and a ball has struck down the old man sitting at the well, and I have to draw my comrades closer round me, and hold the hall as best we can with a raking fire that makes the Tedeschi reel and scatter as they come.

Then follows the fiercest, hottest, darkest, dreadest moments of my life.

The shadow on the sun-dial creeps on; it is a

quarter past four and more. My little troop is only half in numbers what it was when the bird sang. The grape-shot falls like hail. Unless the Sardinians come quickly——

The shadow on the dial creeps onward.

It is no longer mere firing and counter-firing; it is a hard, devilish, hand-to-hand, throat-to-throat struggle on the marble stairs and pavement that is all slippery with carnage.

Some of the Jägers have found a second stairway on the other side of the villa, and so have crept up unseen by us, and pour out on to the head of the great staircase, and thrust us downward, so that we are between two forces, as in a vice. We are some thirty men in all—not more; and many of us are wounded, and very weak from long thirst and the heat of the day.

Caught between these two, the Jägers pressing on us from behind, the Tirolese forcing us backwards on to their comrades' steel, we struggle, God knows how, in a horrible crush and medley, across the court and into the green grass-lands of the gardens, where the ripening grapes are hanging on all the trellised vines.

Here, if the Sardinians do not come, we must be butchered like so many sheep. Yet all the while it is hardly of the Sardinians that I think; it is of the dear little lad making his perilous way through the canes underneath the poplars; and every now and then, even in the fellness and ferocity of the struggle, I turn my head to look beyond the laurels to the grassy stretches across which he must return.

The brutes hem us in on both sides. The men

go down like corn under the sickle. I and the few who remain contrive to force a little breathing space, so that we have our backs to the villa gates and get clear a moment of one half the pressure.

At that moment I see Raffaellino.

He is running, not creeping fox-like, as he should do, for the canes to shield him; but running erect, his feet are bare as in his childish days over the stones of Verona, that he may speed himself the quicker; his fair tangled hair is blowing back from his face. He has picked up a shattered standard somewhere, and the colours of Free Italy float from him as he comes.

He waves it and cries aloud to me, the dear, rash, impatient, unselfish little lad; because he knows that, in such straits as ours, hope, being a moment delayed, may be too late forever.

He cries to me, the little dear, brave lad—

“Hold out ten minutes, and they are here.”

Then, as he speaks, there is a shower of green leaves above his head; he throws his curls back with a strange dizzy gesture; then he stops short there in the grassy path, with all the vines and the rose-laurels close about him; then down he falls, face forward, on the turf.

They have shot him from behind the laurel-hedge.

What it does to me I know not; I only know that all the rage of desert lions wounded, and all their strength with it, seems to pour into me.

Seeing the child fall there, I only know that I pierce the storm of shot, and cleave the pressure of the Austrians with a fury before which all is borne down as before the rush of a mountain tempest.

I only know that so do the agony and vengeance in my soul set light to the passions of every Italian with me in that hour, that, ere the ten minutes are spent, ere the Sardinians are with us, we—not thirty men in all, and faint and bleeding, and far outnumbered—have driven the foe out from the courts and gardens, and hurled them on to meet their death under the hewing steel and trampling hoofs of the Sardè horsemen as they sweep up to aid us by the river's course.

And then—when it is all over, and the place is clear, and over the broad plain all men know that Italy has won—then I go and find the dear child, there where he fell, with the torn flag under him, and the rosy laurel flowers hanging their clusters over his pretty head.

Is he quite dead?

Not quite. When I lift him, his heavy, blue-veined lids raise themselves, and his eyes smile. But I, who have seen so many men die, know that this is Death, though the strong sun still shines so clearly and the rose-laurels blow in the wind.

"Give it me," he says softly; his voice is barely audible.

They have shot him in the chest, and he bleeds to death internally.

I know what he means.

I unstrap his knapsack and take out the little viol that he used to play on in the moonlight in the arch of the coppersmith's door in sad Verona.

He thanks me with his sweet, wistful, shining eyes, and tries to touch the chords.

It is of no use; he has no strength left. He tries

no longer; his hand falls, and he sighs a little, whilst the rose-laurels brush his curls.

"Take it to her from me," he murmurs. "Perhaps she will remember a little—now and then."

Then he lifts his face, like a tired child, and kisses me on the cheek, and smiles against the sun.

"Do the dead grilli sing where God is?" he says; and then the breath quivers a moment on his mouth, and the eyelids fall, and I know that he sees the sun no more.

* * * * *

At evening on that day all men praise me, and they speak great things of my leadership whereby the villa was won; and even my king gives me brave words upon the field; and I, Pascarèl, the player, have won a name as a soldier of Italy that is not unworthy the dead Pascarèlli who live in stone in the crypts and the cloisters.

But I hear it all as in a dream; I see it all as through half-blind eyes.

What I hear is the song of the grilli that is silent for evermore with all the rest of the sweet wild music that lived in that innocent soul. What I see is the tender body of Raffaellino, where we have laid it in the silent hall of the villa, with the moonbeams shining white about his head, and on his breast a knot of the red rose-laurel.

Ah, God! it is as cruel as to wring the throat of a bird in full song. Ah, God! the fair dawn that will have no noon; the sweet blossom that will have no flower!

CHAPTER VI.

Red and Gold.

My father tells me to put on that cinquecento dress of red and gold, and set the rose-diamonds he gave me in my breast and hair, and be ready for a great masque at a great palace to-night, when all Florence is mad and drunk with joy.

Here in the stillness of the villa gardens, up where Sta. Margharità lifts her little bell-tower to heaven, even here, though so high in the hills, the sound of the people's rejoicing comes to me all the day long, as the heavy sigh of a distant sea rolls up to those who sit on the cliffs above.

I have told them I am tired and so cannot see the city in her festivity to-day. But it is not true. The truth is, that I shudder from the shouts of homage and the sight of mirth.

For he is not dead; he has even done great things upon those terrible plains—so rumour says; giving him the green bay of the patriot in lieu of the paper laurels of the player. But I cannot go down into his Florence, this the first day her troops return to her. I cannot risk to see his face as strangers see it, and look upon him in the press of the glad streets, maimed, perhaps, war-worn, dust-covered, lame with long marches in the summer suns—as heaven knows I may.

And little 'Ino; my rash words must have sent him to the front, for they know nothing of him in that old cool cypress-shaded chamber behind the Torrigianni Palace; and I can hear nothing of him—a mere little

lad, a mere grain of dust in the great plains, a mere drop of blood in the vast sea of carnage.

Men make no account of him. I cannot hear if he be living or dead; my poor little bright playmate, who stood and sang with me that day of carnival in old Verona. And whatever his fate be, I sent him to it.

Ah! why do we frail, foolish, fire-filled things that they call women live only to hurt and kill?—all heedlessly as children catch at flies?

My heart is heavy as I sit within all the long luminous Tuscan day, and hear the echo of the people's mirth, the thunder of the guns, the tramp of marching columns, the roll of beaten drums that comes dulled by distance up the olive slopes upon my ear.

But when the day is dead I cannot have the sad luxury of solitude longer. My father and cousin will not be denied. I put on the masque dress with the diamonds that Varkò painted, and I make ready for the festa of the night.

It is a wonderful and costly thing, this dress; I have not worn it yet in public. The train is cloth of gold, and the scarlet skirts beneath are sown with little diamonds. It was my father's fancy, copied from some old Florentine picture that he has.

It is very beautiful and rare, and lights me like a robe of flame, and makes my eyes gleam black as night, and my rebellious hair all shine like crisp new gold.

And yet—and yet—I fancy I looked better in the old yellow and purple skirts, with my hands full of poppies and my curls caught with the wild vine.

I lean on the terrace balustrade, and, despite my wealth of diamonds, am sick at heart.

My cousin joins me: he is courtly and full of grace; but a great distrust of him is always on me, and some memory that I hate, yet cannot disentangle, arises in me always with the sound of his voice—a voice ever harsh, however skilfully modulated.

This evening, while the sun is sinking over Carrara, he urges, for the twentieth time, his love upon me.

He is in earnest, that I think. He seeks me with passion and purpose; and my father has more than once sought to persuade me that the destiny of my future years lies here, in all this man can give.

This evening, while the sun is red, my cousin presses his prayer on me until I turn in weariness and rebellion.

"Once for all," I say to him, with a tired impatience of his honied phrases that sound so poor and pale beside the memory of those words amongst the golden vines under Fiesole. "Once for all, will you not take my answer? I have said it often—no! no! no!"

"I am then quite hateful to you?" he asks, very low.

I look him full in the eyes, and answer straightly.

"Well, you are."

No milder way will end his importunity.

Then the veiled evil in him wakes.

"That is your last word?" he asks.

"My very last."

"Well then," he says, and smiles a little cloudy as he speaks. "Well then, I have a tale to tell you. I, straying about in this dear Italy of yours, found myself, of a winter's night, in old Verona. There

was a masked ball. I went to it. Amongst the crowd there was a beautiful wild, naughty thing who had broken loose from home and took her pleasure there. I paid her entrance-money; so I know—”

He checked with a gesture the cry that escaped me, as the memory which had pursued me in the sound of his voice rose clear.

“Nay, hear me. I will make my story brief. I had no thought who the girl was—a pretty, foolish, feather-brained fierce thing; but as time went I found she bore, rightly or wrongly, the name I bore myself. I lost her in Verona, and in the summer of the self-same year I saw her wandering with some strolling players, and let her go, for what was she to me? A little while, and, through many deaths and strange accidents in my family, the lands and the titles fell on one who had been disowned by all his race for his loose living—a worn-out gambler, to whom fortune came at last in much magnificence. I came to know him, since I was next of kin, and in his daughter I discovered my waif and stray of the Verona carnival. And then,—foolishly, no doubt,—I grew to love her. Ay, I do love her, that I swear; and all a gentleman can offer to the woman he loves I offer now to her. But if she turn against me, if she say me no in her haughty, pretty fashion, that is half wild still, then let her beware. For, though she holds herself so royally, she is but a bastard born. For, though none knows it but myself, her mother, the Florentine singer, was no wife.”

The blood leaps into my face, and seems to sting me like a thousand vipers. Not knowing what I do,

I strike him hotly in the eyes with a bough of the pomegranate that I hold broken in my hand.

"It is a lie!" I cry against him.

He recoils a moment, pale as death. Then, bowing low, he says,—

"Go,—ask your father."

"You dare me to that!"

"Go,—ask," he says to me calmly, with a quiet smile.

I go.

My father is there in the great dusky white room that the sunset is touching to all kinds of tender hues, like those that fall through the painted casements of great churches.

I go to him swiftly across the vast glistening floor, very silently; yet he looks up with a startled glance in his cold clear eyes.

Perhaps I look strangely; I do not know; my mouth burns and my face is flushed. I feel lost, and amazed, and feverish, and vaguely frightened, as I did when I was astray in the press and fury of the Veglione.

"Is it true?" I ask him.

He looks me full in the face, and smiles a little—slowly.

"Is what true?"

"That my mother was not your wife?"

The smile lingers on his mouth. It is very cruel though so slight.

"What does it matter? Mariuccia thought her so; think you so if you like."

My own voice seems to choke me as I say—

"Mariuccia thought so? Yet it was a lie. Is that your answer?"

He looks at me coldly, full in the eyes—

"She was a singer. I never married her. Why should I? You had never known it, had you been wiser and listened to your cousin. These things can be kept unseen in the same family. But with another there would be trouble; one would need to tell the truth. What can it matter? You have all you want. You are called a great lady, and no one has looked too closely—yet. Some money I can leave you, and you are rich in jewels. For, in a way, I love you, 'Nella; you are beautiful, as a picture is, and your wild grace is charming, and you fool men with true woman's skill. But if you be wise, you will wed with your cousin. No questions then, and the old name your own, with no bar sinister. Mariuccia was a poor old purblind fool; she thought your mother was a wedded wife, and who should undeceive her? Pshaw! why look at me like that? I never told you any lie—not I. Go and marry with your cousin, and who will know it then? It rests with you."

I am silent.

My father rises, with a certain trouble on his face that for once clouds its cool serenity. He tries to touch my hair, but I avoid him by a gesture that makes him shrink a little.

"Nay, 'Nella, why take it to heart like that?" he says, with a tone in his voice that is half pity and half derision. "You thought your mother married; well, that was Mariuccia's fault, not mine. I never told you so. And, indeed, to quiet her, she passed as my wife, to others, for most of the few short years

she lived. What had you to complain of?—nothing surely. Most men would have put you in a convent or had you taught some useful trade, or left you as a model to your friends the painters. But I have dealt with you as though you were my heiress. And I—I promised your mother when she died—I have told no one, have told no one: not even your friend the vagabond player, when he upbraided me for my neglected duties with a *furia* only possible to a flame-tongued Italian. No one knows it, save your cousin; and he, you should be told, found it out long, long ago, from following you one night in old Verona, when you broke away from home and ran in mischief to the Veglione. You never saw his face that night, but he remembered yours. Now see you this, 'Nella, if you be wise, your secret is his; wed with him. He has a great passion for you, and is sincere,—so far,—but if you cross him what can I do for you?—Nothing. He can strike you with that sole sure weapon—truth. And you will feel your fall. For you have wasted wealth as though you were an empress born; and you are one of those wild, wayward, graceful, useless, pretty things, with nothing but a picture of a face and a bird's trick of song. You are one of those who will not like the world, *carina mia*, unless its soil be velvet to your foot. Be wise while there is time, and rest a great lady always. Wed your cousin."

And with that my father rises and leaves the chamber, already weary of a theme that has no pleasure in it. I stand in the red sunset light, looking out blankly on the glory of the oleander flowers that fill the open casement with their fire.

Is all the world a lie?

CHAPTER VII.

The broken Bubble.

WHAT is it I feel?

I scarcely know. I act without knowing—only stung into a bitter, burning, all-corroding shame, that drives me like a whip of scorpions.

Oh, poor little fool, who sat upon the broken stairs shelling the beans at Mariuccia's feet, and prattled of a great past and a great future alike allied to me by the golden and magic chain of birth! Oh, poor vain, baby dreamer, idler than the child that blows soap bubbles in the sun, who had come hither across the mountains, with my golden florins for all my store, doubting not that the purples of some mighty destiny would enfold me as soon as I should open the gates of the south!

Was ever anything more pitiful, more foolish, more pathetically lonely, more grotesquely fooled than I? Was ever any hapless idiot, thinking himself the sovereign of the world, under a crown of straw, more deluded and more desolate than I have been when I have played at greatness?

A withering shame consumes me; the humiliation clings to me like Glauce's web of fire.

My poor poor mother too! In the scorch and fury of my own wretchedness tears well into my eyes as I think of her—think no blame; ah no! heaven forbid! Doubtless her fault of love was purer and more innocent by far than my rank greed of self.

My cousin's hand puts asunder the oleander flowers. He comes and looks me in the face.

"Well?" he asks, softly. "You see I told you truth. Is it now yes or no?"

I turn on him as a leopardess turns on her pursuer. The longing thrills in me to strike him in the eyes, as I had done that winter's day at dusk in the Verona streets.

"No!" I cry to him. "No! a million times! What! you think my fear is greater than my hate? Sir,—you mistake, then. No, I say. No, no, no. Do you hear? No—if I die for it."

In that moment I am all again the passionate outraged child who had fled from him in the Veronese twilight.

The years, the dignities, the tranquil scorn of my late life drop from me; I become again only the fierce, fearless, thoughtless, haughty little waif and stray whom Pascarel had rescued on the Veglione night.

I leave him standing there against the red oleander, dazed, as it were, with the fire of my eyes and speech; then, without another word, I sweep to my own chamber, lock myself in from him and every other, and tear off, like a frantic creature, the gold and red of my perfect masque-dress. The shining skirts fall in a crushed heap; the costly train is crumpled up like wind-blown leaves; I shake the jewels from my breast and hair; I pluck the great rose-diamond from above my ear.

The things are to me hateful, horrible, vile: my father's gifts, indeed—ay, and so far justly mine; but they are accursed to me like the wages of my mother's shame and death.

I do not reason; I can only feel.

As my father denied me when I stood before him with my poor little sceptre of the peacock's plumes, so I deny him now.

There is no tie between us.

As the law yields me no rights on him, so I will yield him no rights on me.

My heart burns that I have ever eaten his bread and ever spent his gold.

A madness of determination comes to me. I will not stay for the smile and sneer of the women I have reigned over, of the men I have made my slaves. I will not stay an hour more in this, the second paradise of lies, that has lulled me to sleep sweet as the lotus, deadly as the upas.

I am useless; ay, indeed; but still I have my voice. It can charm courts, let it charm nations. I can be once more the people's Uccello.

Ah, no! never again that. Never again the light-hearted and thoughtless child that sang to the listening Tuscans when the lùcciole lit the plains. The best that can be before me, if a life of triumph, yet must be a life of utter loneliness.

My heart grows sick with dread and longing.

I do not reason; I can only feel.

Between my father's life and mine there is a deep gulf fixed. It is the darkness of my mother's grave.

It is evening. The sun is gone. The shadow of night is here, even on these heights by Santa Margharità.

I leave aside every coin, every gem, every trifle of luxury or cost I ever have possessed. I leave aside all my splendid costumes and my priceless diamonds. I wrap myself in a dark cloak, and cast a veil about

my head, and, without the value of a copperpiece upon me, I undo the bar of a side door that looks upon the gardens and pass out. On the threshold I linger and look back.

Lights are burning in the wide chamber. The glittering things I have thrown down catch the reflection; sumptuousness, grace, ease — all are symbolised in them.

Am I unhappy because I leave them? No.

My whole life is on fire with shame, and my whole soul is sick with falsehood. But amidst it all a strange sweet thrill stirs; for I am free.

It has been but a gilded slavery, this grand and gorgeous pageantry of the great world.

I long for the breezy downs, and the wild hillsides, and the sweet liberty of untrammelled movement, and the peaceful sleep of healthful tired limbs. And yet — oh, God! I shudder as I think — my life will be alone, all alone always.

What beauty will the daybreak smile on me? What fragrance will the hill-side bear for me as I roam?

I shall see the sun for ever through my tears. Around me on the summer earth there will be forever silence. For Love has left me.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Lily and the Laurel.

I UNBAR the door and pass into the coolness of the early night. Down there where Florence lies it seems alive with fire. The people rejoice for their heroes.

Without any thought or measure of what may befall to me, or whither I, penniless and defenceless, may hereafter go,—I leave the gardens by the path that passes through the olive woods, and once more drifting like a snapped flower on the wind, I set my face towards the city.

The night is perfect.

All the hillside is hushed to an intense stillness. The olive woods upon Arcetri are white as silver in the moon. The hills are steeped in radiance. The roses underneath the vines are bright as in the day.

From the depth where the massed lights of the town are shining there come sounds of music, outcries of the populace, deep shouts that rise and lose themselves like echoing thunder amongst the mountains lying round. Florence rejoices in her strength; to her, as her dower, Hercules gave the dragon's teeth, and she has sown them on her sacred soil, and they have sprung up armed men who have held her own again and again against the world, and have not failed her now.

I go down the old green familiar ways; the field-mice run from my feet amongst the tulip roots; just so, down this very path stole Lucrezia to Fra Lippi, but I am alone—all alone.

They will think I am safe in my chamber. They will not seek for me to-night. And by morning I must be away somewhere; away seeking for work.

I have nothing even to buy bread with on the morrow.

It is no worse with me than it was in this very city when under the old trees I had sat and wept my heart out because I was a beggar. And yet how

much poorer I am! for then I had all my dreams, and all things were possible to me. But now I have nothing, not even a hope, only a dead rose on my heart that I shall ask them to bury with me as old Giùdettà asked.

Fifty years she lived with one memory shut in her soul, darning the dancers' magliè, and thinking of the love of her youth. Oh, God!—is that all the Future holds for me?

I tremble and grow sick with fear as I thread the olives and vines to the city.

But I never pause and look back, not once; I seem to hear Mariuccia say in the still cool night, "Live on the shame and the sorrow of your mother? nay, anima mia, be strong and die first."

Is it a folly that?—I do not know. I do not think, I say; I only feel; and I keep my face straight to the city.

The masque dress I threw aside was put on for a palace festa. The whole town is wild with jubilee. The shouts roll deep like the war-cry of lions.

All down the water side the lamps and the torches burn by millions. The bridges are lines of fire. Great Vecchio glows like a lighted beacon against the clouds. The river is a sea of flashing colour, from the many-hued globes of the illumined boats. Laughter and music, and the ring of choruses, and the call of trumpets, and the surge-like sound of an ever moving mass of men grow nearer and nearer, as I pass through the gates, and into the Street of the Maytime.

Everywhere the night is bright as the day. Long garlands swing from one side of the street to the other.

The old grim iron-bound houses are hidden in flowers and foliage. Under the feet are dropped blossoms, and above head is a maze of roses. Not a single casement, not the poorest, but has hung out its basket of flowers; great lilies, wild poppies, tuberoses, coils of vine, trails of ivy, leaves of arums, everywhere in the streets they are shedding their sweet woodland dews on the stones.

The reign of feasts and of flowers has followed the season of death. All Florence is out to-night, drunk with freedom and crowned with victory.

Everywhere the great arched house doors stand open. Everywhere groups of soldiers are drinking or dancing. Arms are piled in the squares. Women waltz down the grim passage-ways singing.

Conscripts war-stained and dust-covered tell tales to a wondering crowd.

Tables are spread under the stars; under the garlands that the wind tosses hither and thither.

Bells are pealing; cannon are firing; great sheaves of coloured fires are launched to the clouds. In the churches they chaunt orisons. In the palaces they will dance till the dawn.

In the woods by the river the troops are bivouacked; and there in the fields the men and the maidens reel and spin, and leap and laugh, to the wildest mirth and melody.

For in the Field of Flowers, for the hundredth time, they have planted the Laurel.

The gladness makes me colder and wearier as I go. The light and laughter would drive me homeward in desolation, had I a home to shelter me.

Vaguely I feel that the people look upon me in

wonder. I, a dark, veiled, shivering thing, a blot on the endless radiance—Ginevra, in her cere-clothes, amidst the mad masquing of an universal Carnival.

But they part in reverence before me, and are a little quiet as I pass them; they think that I mourn some dead soldier lying in the maize-fields beneath the shadow of the Alps. I mourn the dead, indeed; dead days, dead love, dead liberty.

But my dead I slew with my own hand, all witting what I did. That I am now alone is just—quite just.

But justice is hard.

It presses on my life like lead. I shut my eyes to shut out from me the frolic and the brilliancy around, and stumble on with little thought or purpose across the river and into the heart of the city.

What can I do? I know no more than knew Ginevra; homeless and denied, with every heart and every house closed against her. But Ginevra had one refuge—I have none.

As I go the throngs grow thicker, they push more eagerly. Their passionate dark faces glow; their voices pour forth torrents of joyous words; their holiday dresses gleam gaily against the shadows and the stone fronts of the buildings; they dash the tears from their eyes for the dead; they laugh with proud joy in the living. And from mouth to mouth, as in the night of the Carnival Fair, one name runs more audible than any other:—

“Pascarèl! —Il Pascarèllo!”

I catch the flying skirts of a woman as she hurries by me.

“He is here! Pascarèl?”

She twitches her garments from me in good-humoured haste.

"Ay! He talks to the people on the Place of the Signoria. He has done great things in the war, they say."

Without well knowing what I do, I too follow with the pressing crowds who are hastening under the Arches of the Uffizii, where the red and white banners are tossing as in the midnight of the Carnival Fair.

As we go under the arcades we pass a little *contadina* in all the bravery of festal ornament; great beads glitter at her throat; golden pins shake in her hair; all colours vie as in the rainbow in her skirts; she laughs, and shows her white teeth, grinning as she sets them in the velvet skin of a peach; she pushes a young slim stripling before her, and scolds him with shrill laughter, mocking at a tremor that shakes his limbs, and a pallor that blanches his cheek.

"To let a look at his face unman you like that, you simpleton!" she cries; and drives him before her, crushing out the juice of the peach between her rosy lips.

It is Brunotta.

So well goes life with the Unfaithful.

I draw my veil closer about my head, and am borne by the strong swift tide of the hurrying crowd into the Place of the Signoria, by the Loggia of the Lances, under the Palace of the People, where the baby Cellini used to sit throned on his servant's shoulders, to sing his little song and pipe his little carol to the grave ears of the great Gonfalonière.

The square is packed close with a listening

people. Their faces are all upturned like the ears of wheat that a strong wind lifts to heaven. All the lines of the mighty building are traced out by running lines of fire. Jets of flame, and garlands of flowers, and blazonries of shields, and folds of standards, all shine together against the moon.

On the steps of Orcagna's Loggia, whence of old the magistracy were wont to harangue the city, with their faces set to the mountains, and the keen hill winds blowing their robes of office, on the steps betwixt the two lions, Pascarel stands, and speaks to the Florentines.

There is the red-cross banner above his head; he wears the simple garb of the Tuscan volunteer, on his chest there is the cross of valour, and on the stones at his feet there lie laurel crowns and clusters of lilies that the people have flung to him.

The moon shines upon his delicate dark face; his straight, poet-like brows; his dreaming eyes, that have at once the scholar's sadness and the soldier's passions.

The multitude is hushed to perfect stillness. They love him too well to lose a single word.

He is telling them a legend in that fantastic humour which has flashed for so many centuries from beneath the tri-cornered hat of Tuscan Stenterello.

Dear to them before, he is now to them sacred; he who has come forth from the heat and the dust of those fields of bloodshed with the splendour of great and daring deeds to lend their lustre to his name, and twine the bay-leaves of the patriot round the harlequin's wand of the player.

I crouch down in the deepest shadow on the lowest step, and gaze upward at him, and drink in the sweet and silver sounds of his voice, until the love I bear him, and the loss of him, make me mad as 'Dino's Pazza was, calling for ever on the grave to yield her dead.

He was all mine;—all mine;—dear God! Mine all the rich, glad, fearless freedom of his life; mine all the rapturous caressing, priceless passion of his love;—mine all! And I have lost them.

The war has left him life, but he is dead to me.

And yet I listen as he speaks to the people. I, athirst for the mere echo of his step as dying men in deserts for the fountains of lost lands.

“You know how S. Michael made the Italian?” he is saying to them, and the clear crystal ring of the sonorous Tuscan reaches to the farthest corner of the square. “Nay?—oh, for shame! Well, then, it was in this fashion; long, long ago, when the world was but just called from chaos, the Dominiddio was tired, as you all know, and took his rest on the seventh day; and four of the saints, George and Denis and Jago and Michael, stood round him with their wings folded and their swords idle.

“So to them the good Lord said: ‘Look at those odds and ends, that are all lying about after the earth is set rolling. Gather them up, and make them into four living nations to people the globe.’ The saints obeyed and set to the work.

"S. George got a piece of pure gold and a huge lump of lead, and buried the gold in the lead, so that none ever would guess it was there, and so sent it rolling and bumping to earth, and called it the English people.

"S. Jago got a bladder filled with wind, and put in it the heart of a fox, and the fang of a wolf, and whilst it puffed and swelled like the frog that called itself a bull, it was despatched to the world as the Spaniard.

"S. Denis did better than that; he caught a sunbeam flying, and he tied it with a bright knot of ribbons, and he flashed it on earth as the people of France; only, alas! he made two mistakes, he gave it no ballast, and he dyed the ribbons bloodred.

"Now S. Michael, marking their errors, caught a sunbeam likewise, and many other things, too; a mask of velvet, a poniard of steel, the chords of a lute, the heart of a child, the sigh of a poet, the kiss of a lover, a rose out of paradise, and a silver string from an angel's lyre.

"Then with these in his hand he went and knelt down at the throne of the Father. 'Dear and great Lord,' he prayed, 'to make my work perfect, give me one thing; give me a smile of God.' And God smiled.

"Then S. Michael sent his creation to earth, and called it the Italian.

"But—most unhappily, as chance would have it—Satanas, watching at the gates of hell, thought to himself, 'If I spoil not his work, earth will be Eden in Italy.' So he drew his bow in envy, and sped a

poisoned arrow; and the arrow cleft the rose of paradise, and broke the silver string of the angel.

"And to this day the Italian keeps the smile that God gave in his eyes; but in his heart the devil's arrow rankles still.

"Some call this barbed shaft Cruelty; some Superstition; some Ignorance; some Priestcraft; maybe its poison is drawn from all four; be it how it may, it is the duty of all Italians to pluck hard at the arrow of hell, so that the smile of God alone shall remain with their children's children.

"Yonder in the plains we have done much; the rest will lie with you, the Freed Nation."

A shout from the people drowns his voice and stays it for a moment, the shout of assent and of homage, of love for him and of love for the country.

For a while I hear nothing.

I weep as women must weep by the grave of some noble dead thing they have lost. All my soul goes forth to him on fire. All the passion that he taught me that night of the saints, amongst the golden vines beneath Fiesole, burns in me and consumes me with its longing and despair. Not knowing what I do, I stretch my arms to him and moan aloud;—none hearken.

For a little space I fail to see or listen; I hear only a dull sound, as a drowning thing may hear the sighing of waters that devour it; when sense comes back to me he is still speaking to the people; but far

more gravely now; his eyes kindle, his face flushes, his voice has in it all the yearning of a mighty love; his words fall without thought into the cadence of the terza rima.

He speaks thus:

"All greatest gifts that have enriched the modern world have come from Italy. Take those gifts from the world, and it would lie in darkness, a dumb, barbaric, joyless thing.

"Leave Rome alone, or question as you will whether she were the mightiest mother, or the blackest curse that ever came on earth. I do not speak of Rome, imperial or republican, I speak of Italy.

"Of Italy, after the greatness of Rome dropped as the Labarum was raised on high, and the Fisher of Galilee came to fill the desolate place of the Cæsars.

"Of Italy, when she was no more a vast dominion, ruling over half the races of the globe, from the Persian to the Pict, but a narrow slip bounded by Adriatic and Mediterranean, divided into hostile sections, racked by foreign foes, and torn by internecine feud.

"Of Italy, ravaged by the Longobardo, plundered by the French, scourged by the Popes, tortured by the Kaisers; of Italy, with her cities at war with each other, her dukedoms against her free towns, her tyrants in conflict with her municipalities; of Italy, in a word, as she has been from the days of Theodoric

and Theodolinda to the days of Napoleon and Francis Joseph. It is this Italy—our Italy—which through all the centuries of bloodshed and of suffering never ceased to bear aloft and unharmed its divining rod of inspiration as S. Christopher bore the young Christ above the swell of the torrent and the rage of the tempest.

“All over Italy from north to south men arose in the darkness of those ages who became the guides and the torchbearers of an humanity that had gone astray in the carnage and gloom.

“The faith of Columbus of Genoa gave to mankind a new world. The insight of Galileo of Pisa revealed to it the truth of its laws of being. Guido Monacco of Arezzo bestowed on it the most spiritual of all earthly joys by finding a visible record for the fugitive creations of harmony ere then impalpable and evanescent as the passing glories of the clouds. Dante Alighieri taught to it the might of that vulgar tongue in which the child babbles at its mother’s knee, and the orator leads a breathless multitude at his will to death or triumph. Teofilo of Empoli, discovered for it the mysteries of colour that lie in the mere earths of the rocks and the shores, and the mere oils of the roots and the poppies. Arnaldo of Breccia lit for it the first flame of free opinion, and Amatus of Breccia perfected for it the most delicate and exquisite of all instruments of sound, which men of Cremona, or of Bologna, had first created, Maestro Giorgio, and scores of earnest workers whose names are lost in Pesaro and in Gubbio, bestowed on it those homelier treasures of the graver’s and the potter’s labours which have carried the alphabet of art

into the lowliest home. Brunelleschi of Florence left it in legacy the secret of lifting a mound of marble to the upper air as easily as a child can blow a bubble, and Giordano Bruno of Nola found for it those elements of philosophic thought, which have been perfected into the clear and prismatic crystals of the metaphysics of the Teuton and the Scot.

"From south and north, from east and west, they rose, the ministers and teachers of mankind.

"From mountain and from valley, from fortress smoking under battle, and from hamlet laughing under vines; from her great wasted cities, from her small fierce walled towns, from her lone sea-shores ravaged by the galleys of the Turks, from her villages on hill and plain that struggled into life through the invaders' fires, and pushed their vineshoots over the tombs of kings, everywhere all over her peaceful soil, such men arose.

"Not men alone who were great in a known art, thought, or science, of these the name was legion; but men in whose brains, art, thought, or science took new forms, was born into new life, spoke with new voice, and sprang full armed a new Athene.

"Leave Rome aside, I say, and think of Italy; measure her gifts, which with the lavish waste of genius she has flung broadcast in grand and heedless sacrifice, and tell me if the face of earth would not be dark and drear as any Scythian desert without these?

"She was the rose of the world, aye—so they bruised and trampled her, and yet the breath of heaven was ever in her.

"She was the world's nightingale, aye—so they

burned her eyes out and sheared her wings, and yet she sang.

"But she was yet more than these: she was the light of the world: a light set on a hill, a light unquenchable. A light which through the darkness of the darkest night has been a Pharos to the drowning faiths and dying hopes of man."

His voice rings like the call of a trumpet over the hushed and awe-touched multitude.

Then it sinks low as a summer wind that steals over a tideless sea; and falls upon the silence with a sound in its gentleness and its solemnity that moves men like a prayer.

"We are Italians," he says, slowly. "Great as the heritage is, so great the duty likewise."

Then he uncovers his head and stands a moment silent in the moonlight. The people are silent too, and many kneel and pray.

CHAPTER IX.

Love is enough.

HE comes down from the highest steps of the Loggia, his hands full of the lilies and the laurels. A mighty shout goes forth from all the city, such a shout as a populace can only give when a great faith beats in ten thousand breasts with the same pulses.

As he passes me, I catch his hand and touch it with my lips.

I worship the greatness in him; I know it all too late; when he was mine, I had cast him from me, now that I am nothing, less than nothing, I cannot even lift my eyes to his. I cannot claim a memory;—that would be charity.

So many touch him as he goes, he does not note my kiss from any other's; a dark veiled figure crouching at his feet; how should he see me in the blaze and stir, and tumult and triumph of this festal night in Florence?

Ginevra was happier than I.

He passes by, not knowing; ah, dear heaven!—can one be so near to any man one hour, and then so utterly a stranger, and more alien to him than the stray dog that brushes by him in the street?

He passes by me; and the crowds seize him, weeping and laughing, and lift him up on their shoulders, and bear him across the great piazza, shouting, with the white cross flags tossing above their heads and women raining roses in the moonlight.

He has his art; his eloquence; his power of the tongue and sword; and all his city's love and loyalty. How natural it is he should forget!—most natural.

But I!—

I crouch down where I first dropped to rest, on the lowest step of the Loggia. The bright bold Perseus keeps watch above, and the black brows of the Judith frown against the stars.

The square is left quiet. The people have flocked elsewhere. The sounds of music and of mirth are still loud over all the town, and the coloured fires flame against the sky. There is a sweet odour heavy

on the air; the stones are strewn with flowers, and they lie dying underneath the moon.

I am half conscious of it all; and yet it all seems far away, so very very far.

I am so young, and yet my life is dead.

The deep chimes toll the hour more than once; it is near midnight; Florence is still light as at noon-tide. Still the noise and the mirth of the people are at their height. It is only the flowers that fade; the flowers that are trodden on the stones.

I sit with my head on my hands, crushed, and broken, and bruised, like one of the trampled lilies.

I do not think of my fate or my future. All I hear is the echo of his voice; all I see is the life lost forever. If I had been patient, if I had been true, if I had been faithful!—but I thirsted for greatness, and it has failed and fooled me. And I have touched his hand, I have looked on his face, I have been close to him, as the dust beneath his feet; and yet I can never claim a look or word again from him. Never,—whilst our lives shall last. For what would any love of mine seem now save like the prayer for alms of any homeless beggar?

The night flies on; the square is almost empty; the flowers are dying fast. I sit there, stupid with my wretchedness; the laurels lie scattered on the steps above.

A footfall comes near.

I shiver and look up; I see him in the moonlight, as so many times I saw him in that glad summer time coming through the silent streets of old forsaken cities, or the poppy-sown breadths of the cornlands.

But now his head is drooped; his face is pale and dark: and, as he goes, instead of the notes of the mandoline there is the clash of his sword on the stones.

He comes across the piazza; he is all alone. As he passes me he pauses and looks; it is his nature to be pitiful to all things. He only sees a human thing bowed down and solitary, mourning where all others feast.

He stops before me, deeming me a stranger.

"What ails you," he asks, "that you sit so while all the town rejoices?"

I cannot answer him. I would rise and flee from him, but my feet feel chained to the marble.

He touches me with gentle compassion.

"Are you a woman and young?—you sorrow for some dead soldier?"

With a great cry I clasp his knees, and lean my head against him.

I sorrow for the dead indeed.

By some instinct or thought of the truth he tears the veil from me, and lifts my face to the light of the moon.

Then—ah, then!—I hunger no more for the sweet hillside on the night of the saints under white Fiesole.

"BUT I am nothing.—nothing—nothing?" I murmur to him, an hour afterwards, as his embrace enfolds me, when all my tale is told.

He answers me with a smile.

"And I have nothing! So we are equal, my treasure! Ah, donzella mia! you have learned then to think with me that these are the fairest things, after all, that the world can give us,—a little laughter and a little love?"

I wind my arms about him where we stand, and lean my cheek on his:

"Say rather only, a little laughter—and a great love."

This is enough indeed: enough, here and hereafter. A love greater than death, great as eternity itself; a love that shall leave earth with us when our souls leave our bodies, and reach its uttermost perfection in other lives, in other worlds; a love that time cannot chill, nor any woe appal, nor God himself unsever

THE town is white against the shadows of the night. The river breaks with sea-like sound against the piles of the old grey bridges. The red cross banners slowly swing their white folds on the wind; the populace has grown quieter.

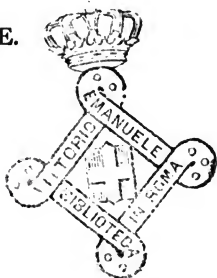
The shields of the old republic brighten their blazonries in the moonbeams. The lions, white amidst a green wealth of forest laurel, guard the place of the public liberties.

The roses and the lilies lie on the stones as on a palace-floor. By the water the people are singing, untired with joy and with triumph.

Is it not ever with such things that one thinks of Florence?

A cloud of blossoms, the notes of a lute, the ripple of a little laugh; the deeper joys of sighs that die in a caress; the far-off echo of a gay glad nation's mirth; a sea of yellow moonlight, broad and cool; the stone faces of fauns and griffins coiled about with acanthus foliage; the sculptured shapes of saints and prophets reigning over a frolic of masquers; the fragrance of sea and mountain blown on fresh winds through shadowy marble ways; and in the sacred stillness of the night, in gardens where the fountains fall, or casements where the lucciole are gleaming, the soft fast throbs of quickened pulses, the touches of lovers' lips in the silence—these things are its breath and its life, the City of Lilies, the Amorous City; built in a field of flowers, on a midsummer night, by the Slayer of the Lion, for the mother of Eros; Florence, the daughter of gods and the queen of the freedom of men; Florence, the poetess and paradise of

LOVE.



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